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## **Assessing the importance of new corridors in the South Caucasus in the context of the Russian- Ukrainian war**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the possibilities of a new corridor in the South Caucasus region in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The research is important because after the 44-day war, fertile conditions for new opportunities have emerged in the South Caucasus region. The Russian-Ukrainian war and the resulting damage to the transport sector, like other sectors, necessitated the creation and use of alternative routes. The questioning of the security of the Black Sea due to the war and the closing of the European space for Russia created a problem for the countries that used Russia and the Black Sea to reach Europe. These countries are already evaluating alternative opportunities to the corridors. One of these possibilities is the Middle Corridor project, which has seen an increase in the volume of transported cargo since its inception, except during the pandemic period. During the war, the shortest possible transport corridor from China to Europe will be provided after the financial investment in the infrastructure and the integration of the Zangezur Corridor into the Middle Corridor, and work on this process is currently being continued. The North-South Corridor, which has been discussed for a long time however has not gained much popularity, gained even more importance during the war, and the works related to the construction of the infrastructure of the corridor were accelerated.

# 1. Introduction

The Russian-Ukrainian war has had and continues to have an effect on the transport sector as well as on all areas. After the 44-day war, the importance of the South Caucasus region as a transport hub, which provided a perspective for new opportunities, increased even more after the Russian-Ukrainian war. The interest of many countries in the South Caucasus region has already increased. Considering all these factors, it is necessary to assess the significance of the developed and potential transport corridors in the South Caucasus region against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war. This article evaluated the importance of the existing and potential transport corridors of the South Caucasus region in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Throughout history, the importance of transport corridors has greatly contributed to the development of the country and the region in general. In the current modern era, the development of transport corridors is directly proportional to the development of the economy, and the transport sector has no small place in the economy of countries. In order to build an efficient transport system and transport corridors, it is first of all important to have an efficient geographical location and positive economic and other relations between the countries of the region. Its geographical location has made the South Caucasus region a hub of the transport corridor. Its favorable geographical position has contributed to the development of South Caucasus countries, but this contribution has not been the maximum. Thus, this region has been the field of political, religious and cultural struggle throughout history. This has caused the development of the region, which has a favorable geographical position, to not reach the desired level. With the opening of this corridor, the shortest transport corridor from East to West will be ensured, and Azerbaijan will have access to Nakhchivan and Turkey directly by land, not through Iran or Georgia. This will reduce Iran's role as a transit country in the region. Through this corridor, not only Azerbaijan, but also Russia will have land access to Armenia, and this corridor will provide a high economic contribution to Armenia, whose economy is in decline, thanks to transit fees, increase in trade volume and restoration of communications. With the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, it will be integrated into the Middle Corridor and provide the shortest distance between China and Europe, and will provide a high economic contribution to all the countries of the region. Interest in the middle corridor was not enough until recently. The start of the war between Russia and Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia have sharply increased the interest in this corridor. In the 3rd part of the article, information is given about the North-South corridor, in the 4th part about the Middle corridor and in the 5th part about the economic and political advantages of these corridors for the South Caucasus region.

## 1. Literature review

Policy development in the direction of bringing less developed regions closer to developed regions in terms of welfare makes an important contribution to the reduction of interregional development inequality. As a result, the concepts of region and development are used as a whole, and the concept of regional development is becoming more and more important day by day. (Armstrong, 2005: 276). The development of transport corridors contributes to the efficient use of national transit facilities and the localization of industrial production along their routes, in addition to the expansion of exports and the strengthening of intercontinental states and regions. (Vinokurov and others, 2018b). Especially for countries that do not have direct access to the sea, international cooperation is important for transit access and development of the transport system. (Chowdhury & Erdenebileg, 2006). Landlocked countries grow more slowly than non-landlocked countries (landlocking reduces the country's average growth rate by about 1.5 percent). (Arvis and others, 2010). The growing volume of trade between Europe and Asia requires a comprehensive transcontinental approach to create convenient transport systems. (Vinokurov və Libman, 2012). Without a good transport network, it will be difficult for trade relations to develop and regional development will lag behind other regions. (Saatcioglu & Karaca, 2013: 2). Transport activity has been the direction of trade since the Middle Ages. Trade has always developed along the routes along which transport activities are carried out. Especially known in the Middle Ages and modernized today, the "Silk Road" had a great impact on the development of trade. The Silk Road was created as a route connecting the two great civilizations of the Chinese and Roman Empires, through which goods and ideas were exchanged between the two empires. (Tozar and others, 2011: 3). Uneven distribution of transport infrastructure between regions leads to regional inequality. Road, rail, sea, air and other forms of transport form the transport infrastructure, and these transport systems ensure the delivery of end products to their destination rather than the production of goods. Development of transport infrastructure is one of the most important factors in achieving regional development. (Saatchioglu-Khan, 2013: 1). Many economists believe that there is a direct relationship between economic development and the expansion of transport infrastructure. [eg Litman, 2017, Palei, 2015, Rodrigue, 2020, Tsiotas və Polyzos, 2018]. The development of the transport system is of particular importance in achieving economic development. Low transport costs affect the increase in productivity. For instance, when the freight rate of an imported good is reduced, the profit margin increases and more goods and services are produced, and the resulting increase in production increases employment and welfare, which contributes to economic growth. (Litman, 2010: 7). Realizing and increasing the volume of not only imports but also exports requires efficiency in transport activities. (Rodrigue, 2013: 252). Promotion and development of multimodal transport

corridors and logistics service is also included in the World Bank's overall transport strategy. (World Bank, 2008). The main difference between transport corridors is its transportation costs, duration, reliability and safety of transportation. (Pfohl, 2010, Bayramov 2017). A region without a good transport network lags behind other regions in terms of development. (Saatchioglu & Karaca, 2013, CESD, 2022). Transport corridors contribute to regional development by providing transport and logistics services to the countries located along the corridor. (Arnold, 2005). International transport corridors make it possible to improve freight management, laws and regulations, implement appropriate border-crossing procedures, attract infrastructure investments and improve the efficiency of government-business relations. (World Bank, 2011). The development of transport corridors in the aspect of the Eurasian connection enables the efficient use of national transit opportunities, helps to localize industrial production according to their routes, creates conditions for the expansion of exports and the strengthening of intercontinental states and regions. (Vinokurov and others, 2018). Transport is at the heart of a well-functioning economy, as transport provides the infrastructural basis for sustainable development. Access to efficient transportation and communication systems is an important condition for integration into this network in the modern era, when separate economies are united to create a global production network. (Lakshmanan, 2001). Although the agreement on the North-South corridor was reached at the beginning of the 21st century, the idea of creating transport routes between India and Europe through Russian territory was first discussed in the late 19th century. At that time, the Russian Empire was interested in expanding its railway network to India, passing through Afghanistan and Iran, and reaching the Indian Ocean. (Migulin, 1993). The North-South Corridor is expected to save \$2,500 for every 15 tons of cargo transported compared to the traditional corridor. (Rogers, 2015). Despite the rapid delivery, the freight costs of the International North-South Transport Corridor remain relatively high. The tariff charged for the delivery of cargo equal to 20 feet equivalent unit (TEU) carried by RZD Logistics OJSC, one of the logistics operators of the International North-South Transport Corridor, from the port of Nhava Sheva (India) to Vorsino (Russia) was \$2,650. This tariff is more than 2 times compared to the tariff charged in the pre-pandemic period. In the pre-pandemic period, freight rates for the same amount of cargo on a traditional corridor ranged from \$1,000 to \$1,200. Despite all this, transformative digital technologies can reduce costs for cargo owners and make the International North-South Transport Corridor competitive with traditional sea routes. (Vinokurov and others, 2021). The Zangezur Corridor will have wide strategic importance not only for the Caucasus region, but for the region as a whole. Turkic-speaking countries with a nominal GDP of more than 1.1 trillion dollars will be united economically and strategically through this corridor. This number proves that the

Zangezur corridor is a project with quite a large potential. The opening of this corridor will bring peace to the region and in the future this corridor will be integrated into the Middle Corridor.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. North-South corridor

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<sup>1</sup> Vugar Bayramov. (2021, October 28). The next victory is approaching: what will the Zangezur corridor give to the region? <https://ikisahil.az/post/259534-novbeti-qelebe-yaxinlashir-zengezur-dehlizi-bolgeye-ne-verecek>.



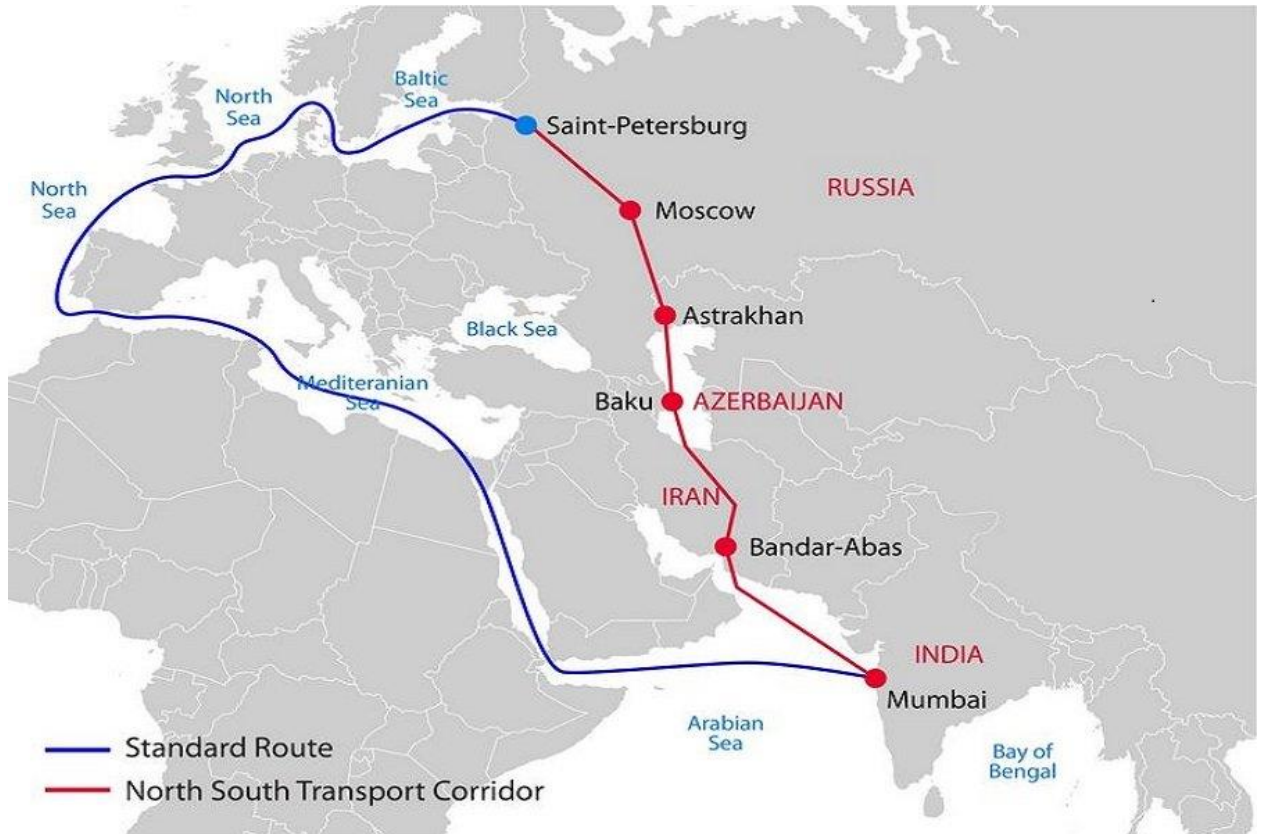
The first agreement on the North-South transport corridor was reached on September 12, 2000 between the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran and India in St. Petersburg, Russia. This agreement entered into force on May 21, 2002. The agreement was applied to all types and means of transport. If the North-South transport corridor operates at full capacity, trade relations with the Black Sea ports of the Caspian countries will intensify, and European countries, Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus regions will be able to access the Persian Gulf and India. total of 13 countries have ratified this corridor. These countries are the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Armenia, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, the Sultanate of Oman, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkey and Ukraine. The main objective of the corridor is to reduce the time it takes to transport goods from India to Russia and also to Northern and Western Europe. At present, it is planned to transport the goods transported in 6 weeks on the usual route in 3 weeks through the North-South corridor. The total length of the corridor is 7200 km. 30-50% of the corridor is planned to pass through the territory of Russia. <sup>2</sup> It is planned to bring the goods by ship from Mumbai port of India to Bandar-Abbas port of Iran, then load them on a train and transfer them to Ghazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) railway line, and then deliver them from the territory of Azerbaijan to Russia and from there to European countries. In the near future, after the completion of the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway, direct railway transportation will be possible, and as a result, the volume of transportation is expected to increase significantly. After the North-South Corridor is fully operational, the overall profit is expected to increase. Also, after the completion and commissioning of this railway line, the goods transported from the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asian countries to Europe and from Europe to the countries of the mentioned region will be delivered to Europe by passing through Iran and Azerbaijan.

**Figure 1** shows the map of the North-South transport corridor and its difference compared to the traditional route.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unectf.org/simal-c%C9%99nub-beyn%C9%99lxalq-n%C9%99qliyyat-d%C9%99hlizi-az%C9%99rbaycanin-regiondaki-maraqlari-ucun-n%C9%99-d%C9%99r%C9%99c%C9%99d%C9%99-arzuolunan-v%C9%99-faydalidir/>

**Figure 1.** North-South transport corridor and traditional route



Source: *International North-South Transport Corridor set to expand capacity, 2019*, <https://www.onthemosway.eu/international-north-south-transport-corridor-set-to-expand-capacity/>

The total length of the North-South corridor is 7,200 km, which is 4,400 km shorter than the traditional route through the Suez Canal (11,600 km). Through this corridor, cargoes were supposed to be transported from the port of Mumbai, India, by sea to Iran, and from there, part by rail, and the other part by the Caspian Sea to Baku, and then to Russia and from there to Northern and Western Europe. The continuation of the Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) railway and the 164 km long Rasht-Astara railway line, which is the missing part of the corridor, is expected to be built and commissioned within the next 3 years.<sup>3</sup> After operating this railway, the shortest transport corridor between north and south will be created. Until now, this railway line has not been able to increase the growth of existing freight and serious delays have been observed. Cargo transported by railway is unloaded in Iran, loaded onto trucks and travels the distance between Rasht and Astara. This leads to additional cost, limitation of the volume of transportation and increase of transportation time completion of this railway line will create ample opportunities for the corridor in the future. In the current global politics, this issue of the corridor can

<sup>3</sup> <https://sputnik.az/20230118/ran-ve-rusiya-rest-astara-demir-yolunun-tikintisine-sermaye-ile-bagli-raziliga-gelibler-450790456.html>

significantly affect the socio-political and economic relations of the region. The trade between Russia and India could be greatly affected by this route, as the previous route was connected via the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean Sea, the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. Although it has been a long time since the first agreement on the creation of the corridor was reached, until recent years there has been little interest and effort in the corridor. The Russian-Ukrainian war had a serious impact on the transport system, as it affected almost all areas. On the one hand, it sharply reduced the interest in the corridor, and on the other hand, it increased it. After the war, Russia's interest in the North-South corridor increased. The war has disrupted the operation of ports on the Black Sea coast of Ukraine, and there is no longer any guarantee of safety. Russia's access to northern routes has been limited due to sanctions, and as a result, the attractiveness of the new corridor has increased for Russia. This corridor is interesting and important not only for Russia, but for all countries along the corridor. Iran wants to increase the volume of income and export its products to foreign markets by increasing the intensity of transit transportation, which it has faced for a long time. This corridor will also create wide economic opportunities for Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan, aiming to become an important transit center of Eurasia, is confidently walking on this path. The interests of all three neighboring countries coincide in the North-South corridor project. In 2022, 604.2 thousand TEU of cargo was carried through the North-South corridor. The parties have aimed to increase this volume of transportation to 30 million tons by 2030.<sup>4</sup> Despite the increased interest in the corridor by Russia and the countries of the corridor, on the other hand, the interest in the corridor for Europe has decreased sharply. After the Russia-Ukraine war, the interest in this corridor has decreased due to the European countries imposing sanctions against Russia. The exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT payment system created an obstacle to the implementation of payments on shipments, which led to additional costs and delays, the number of sanctions increased in later periods, and as a result, countries that wanted to access Europe through Russia using the corridor were deprived of this opportunity. However, considering the volume of trade between the countries of the corridor and Russia's loss of access to Europe, the importance of the corridor increases for these countries. Zangezur Corridor, although not as much as the Middle Corridor, can have impact on the operation of the North-South Corridor as well. Through this corridor, the geography of cargo transported through both the North-South and Central corridors can be dramatically expanded.

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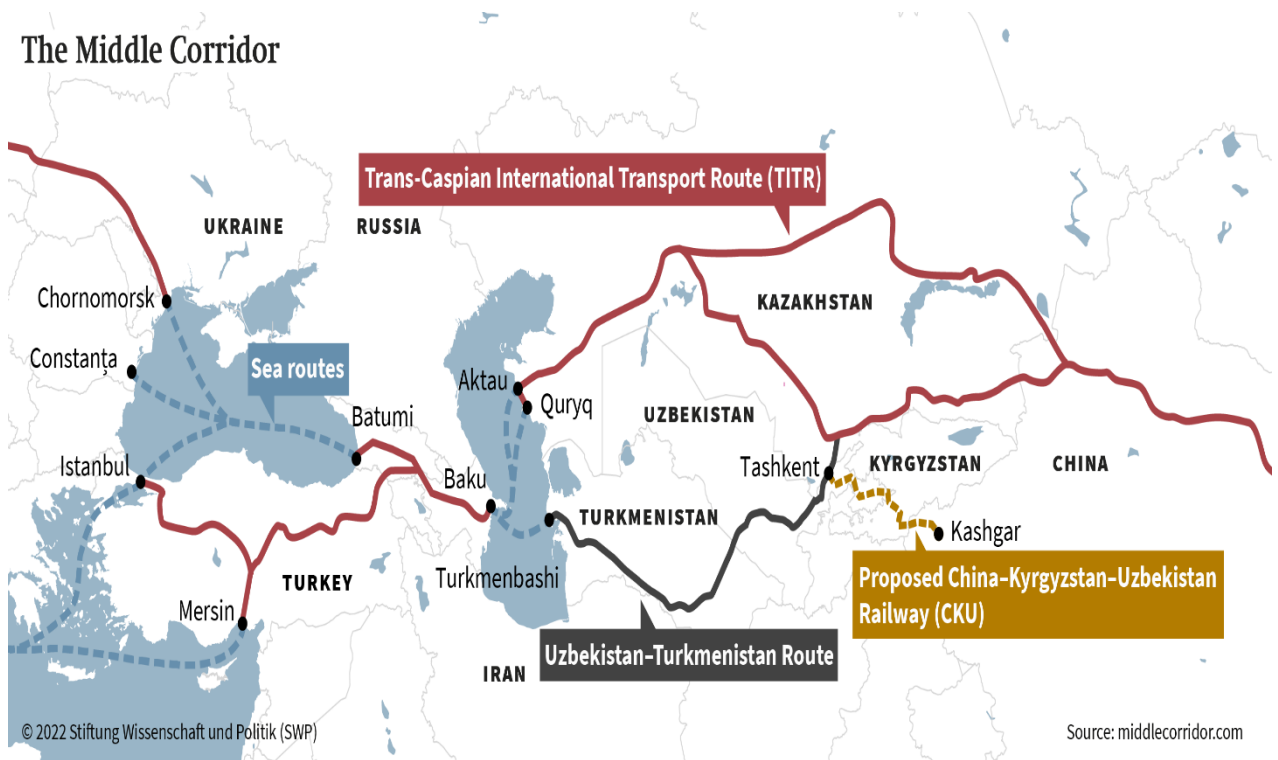
<sup>4</sup> <https://ikisahil.az/post/347032-azerbaycanin-tranzit-ve-neqliyyat-logistika-imkanlari-davamli-olaraq-inkishaf-edir>

### **3. Middle Corridor with potential Zangezur**

More than 90 percent of freight traffic between China and Europe is carried out by ocean. Sea transport is 3.5 times cheaper than rail transport, 7 times cheaper than road transport, and 22 times cheaper than air transport. For these reasons, sea transport is the most used transport in international cargo transportation. Despite all this, the cost of the shipment is as important as the duration of the shipment in international shipping. From this point of view, the railway is not less important in international transportation and is more convenient in terms of speed. All this has led to an increase in the volume of rail transport between China and Europe. Rail freight between China and Europe has rapidly become an attractive "middle option", with its main advantages being that it is cheaper than air and faster than sea. The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, rebranded as the Middle Corridor, could emerge as a multimodal artery in Eurasia's evolving transport network. In today's supply chains, mid-market rail freight is gaining popularity and expanding market share. The Middle Corridor is a multimodal route connecting China and Europe, covering 4,256 km of rail and 508 km of sea transit. This route extends from the China-Kazakhstan border to Europe, passing through Kazakhstan, through the Caspian Sea, through Azerbaijan and then through Georgia. In Georgia, one of the branches of the route passes through Turkey and under the Bosphorus through the Marmaray tunnel, and the other goes through the bottom of the Black Sea to Ukraine and Romania. The block train traveling along this corridor reaches Europe from China in 20-25 days on average. This is one of the main advantages of this transport corridor. The Middle Corridor lies at the intersection of economics and geopolitics, and provides opportunities for landlocked countries in the region to overcome problems of distance and dependency, allowing them to enter the world market, as well as provide strategic diversification independent of Russia. On November 7, 2013, an agreement was signed between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kazakhstan on the establishment of the Coordination Committee for the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. This international association consists of an 8-member board of directors, a transport consortium and a working group. In December 2016, the participants of the Coordination Committee (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Georgia) decided to establish the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route Association, and the association began to operate in February 2017.

**Chart 2** shows the current routes of the Middle Corridor and other planned routes.

**Chart 2. Middle Corridor**

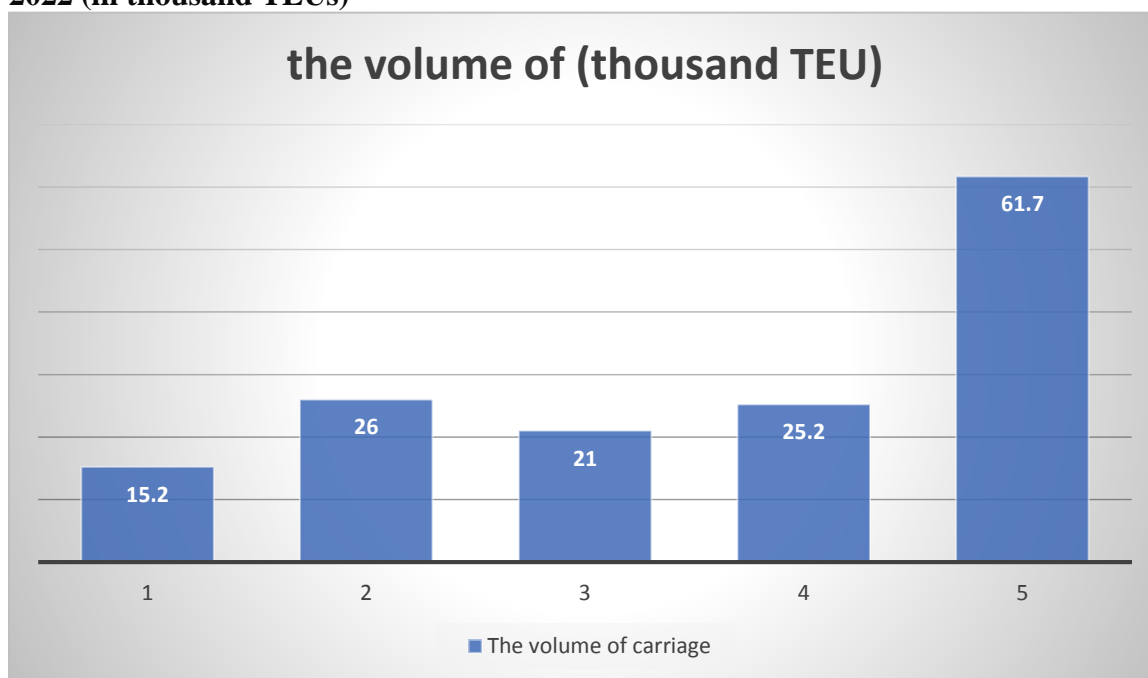


*Source: Russia's War on Ukraine and the Rise of the Middle Corridor as a Third Vector of Eurasian Connectivity, 2022, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C64/>*

As can be seen from the graph 2, cargoes loaded in China reach Georgia by passing through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan, and from there a part is transported directly to the eastern and northern part of Europe through the Black Sea. The other part is transported from Georgia to Turkey and from there to other parts of Europe. A number of positive things have been done in connection with the improvement of the Middle Corridor. Commissioning of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line known as Iron Silk in 2017, development of Caspian port facilities, construction of new seaports and renovation of old ones by Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, commissioning of the Baku International Sea Trade Port (Alat) on the Caspian Sea in 2018 expansion of the port of Aktau in Kazakhstan and modernization of the freight train network in Georgia, the expansion of port capacity as well as the start of construction of a new port for bulk carriers in Anaklia and the renewal and restoration of ports and cargo services in Turkey and China have been and continue to be done with the aim of improving the Middle Corridor. On October 17, 2019, the first freight train departed from the Chinese city of Xi'an to Prague through the Marmaray railway tunnel, the world's first underwater railway tunnel. Thanks to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, the railway connection with the Caucasus region of Turkey, which had been interrupted since the beginning of the 1990s, was reopened. The border is planned on other routes besides the existing routes of the Middle Corridor, one of which is the railway line between China-

Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan, and it is planned to connect it to the corridor at the next stage. **Table 1** shows the volume of cargo transported through the Middle Corridor during 2018-2022.

**Table 1. Statistics of cargo transported through the Middle Corridor between 2018 and 2022 (in thousand TEUs)**



Source: *middlecorridor.com*, *Gaidar Abdikerimov*, 04.27.2023, <https://oananews.org/content/news/singapore-bulgaria-and-lithuania-join-middle-corridor-secretary-general-titr> (2018-2022).

*Unit TEU (Twentyfoot Equivalent Unit) 1 TEU carries up to 24,000 kilograms (24 metric tons) of cargo. The weight of an empty container is 2280 kilograms (2.24 metric tons). Thus, the total weight of a fully loaded twenty-foot container would be 26,280 kilograms (26.28 metric tons). 1 TEU is approximately equal to 26.28 metric tons.*

In 2018, 15.2 thousand TEU of cargo was transported through the Middle Corridor, and this volume increased by 71% in the following period. Due to the problems and obstacles in the transport sector due to the pandemic, a 19.2% decrease in the volume of transported cargo was recorded in 2020, and the volume of transported cargo decreased to 21 thousand TEU. In the post-pandemic period, there has been a 20% increase in the volume of cargo transported through the corridor. Except for the period of pandemic, an increase in the volume of cargo transported through the corridor has been recorded every year since the day the corridor began to operate. These statistics and continued growth further prove the interest in the Middle Corridor. Sustainable development has been achieved thanks to the improvement of infrastructure and expansion of cooperation related to the corridor. Despite all these growth statistics, interest in the Middle Corridor was not enough until recently. Restoration of historical justice and political stability in the South Caucasus region, which is the main part of the corridor, works done in the direction of

infrastructure improvement and expansion of cooperation between the countries of the corridor increased the attention to the corridor. After the war between Russia and Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia, the interest in the corridor increased sharply. First of all, Russia's access to Europe was restricted and it created a serious problem and the need for an alternative corridor for the countries accessing Europe through Russian territory. As a result of all these factors, the volume of cargo transportation of the Middle Corridor, which has become even more attractive and important, increased by 144.8% compared to 2021 and reached 61.7 thousand TEU. Due to the political processes taking place in the world, the improvement of the infrastructure and cooperation of the countries of the Middle Corridor, and as a result, the increased interest of the European countries in this corridor, the traffic volume statistics are expected to increase further in the coming years. Although the corridor has gained popularity since its inception, until recently it had less interest than the Northern Corridor. However the war between Russia and Ukraine changed this situation. As a result of the sanctions applied against Russia, access to all types of transport from Russia to Europe has already been closed. Cargo transported from China to Europe will no longer be able to reach Europe through Russia via the Northern Corridor. This event increased the importance of the Middle Corridor and revived it. In January-March 2022, the volume of cargo transported by the corridor increased by more than 120 percent compared to the same period of 2021, which is a fairly high growth indicator. In the context of ongoing tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the interest of European and other countries in the Middle Corridor is growing and this growth is expected to continue. Because the European border is closed for Russia, and the best alternative to this route is the Middle Corridor. For a long time, Turkey had difficulty in convincing the Central Asian countries regarding the Middle Corridor, because these countries had an asymmetric dependence on Russia. As a result of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, the sanctions imposed against Russia increased the interest of these countries to distance their foreign relations from Russia. This Corridor is of great importance not only because it provides a direct connection, but also because it reduces the dependence of the countries of the region on Russia and Iran. In accordance with the World Bank's report "Impact of the war in Ukraine on global trade and investment", the disruption of the logistics system affected almost all trade flows between Russia and Europe. As a result of the impact of access to Europe along the Northern Corridor from China to Europe, the volume of transportation has decreased by 40 percent. This situation has seriously increased the attractiveness of Turkey's Trans-Caspian or Middle Corridor initiative, which bypasses Russia and Iran. Strengthening Eurasian relations will also help balance the influence of Russia, China and Iran in Central Asia. This corridor could lead to serious growth in the economy of the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Turkey, but the European Union was not very interested in this corridor. The tensions between



Russia and Ukraine have had a negative impact on the energy and supply chain of the European Union, and the European Union has started to look at Central Asia as an alternative after these processes. On July 18, 2022, a new energy agreement was signed between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan, and negotiations are underway on a new comprehensive agreement to expand cooperation in a wide range of economic diversification. In the joint declaration made by the European Union with Kazakhstan, they noted the importance of new alternative routes connecting Asia and Europe in the current political situation and that this is already of strategic importance. Pre-war cargo from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine is already changing geographies, and part of this cargo is already being transported through the Middle Corridor. This corridor is economically very useful for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia and can also contribute to the formation of peace in the region. Although the Middle Corridor is far from the Russia-Ukraine conflict zone, it suffers from the border conflict between the countries of the region and the resulting instability. The geopolitical situation in this region has changed and opened a number of new opportunities after 44 days war. The opening of the transport corridor has become one of the most important topics. The opening of this corridor, that is, the Zangezur Corridor, will restore the direct land connection with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey. The shortest land transport route from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean will be provided through the Zangezur Corridor. Zangezur Corridor will not only restore the land transport connection, but also create a wide range of positive economic opportunities for the countries of the region. The Zangezur Corridor will contribute to long-term peace in the South Caucasus region, which has always suffered from border conflicts and instability.<sup>5</sup> **Figure 3** shows the description of Zangezur Corridor.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/11/08/in-south-caucasus-can-new-trade-routes-help-overcome-history-of-conflict-pub-85729>



### Graph 3. Zangezur Corridor



Source: *Russia's War on Ukraine and the Rise of the Middle Corridor as a Third Vector of Eurasian Connectivity*, 2022, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C64/>

As can be seen from **Table 3**, the Zangezur Corridor provides access to Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan and from there to Turkey and finally to European countries. Although this corridor covers a very small area on the global map, it has great geopolitical importance and will have a positive impact on the development of the countries of the region in the coming years. The main benefit of Azerbaijan from this corridor will be the establishment of a land connection with Nakhchivan, which has not existed for a long time. Wide economic opportunities will be opened for Azerbaijan, which will increase the chances of wide economic cooperation with Turkey and from there with European countries. As a result of the passage of this road from China to Europe through the territory of Azerbaijan, in addition to rent, Azerbaijan will be able to achieve positive development of trade and other areas, and will create fertile conditions for the development of the non-oil sector. The opening of the corridor will play an important role in terms of stability in the region in addition to economic benefits. Thanks to the corridor, Turkey will have access to Central Asia, and considering that the share of Central Asia in Turkey's trade is small, the opening of this corridor can increase the volume of cargo transportation with Central Asian countries. In conclusion, the Zangezur corridor will reduce the cost of transportation, because it provides the shortest distance from Asia to Europe, and as a result, the opening of communications will increase the volume of trade between the countries. Azerbaijan is making positive efforts to open the corridor and works are being done. There is a railway line from Baku to Horadiz, and the 53.2 km section of the 140.6

km long Horadiz-Aghband railway line, which is expected to be completed in 2024, has already been built and work is underway to complete the other section. At the tripartite meeting held in Moscow, a general agreement was agreed on the restoration of the railway connection on the Arazdayan-Julfa-Ordubad-Mehri-Horadiz route.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Azerbaijan invested 100 million dollars to improve the infrastructure of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line passing through Georgia, and the work is expected to be completed in the coming years. It is also planned to expand the sea port and raise it from 15 million tons to 25 million tons. With the completion of the construction of Lachin International Airport, 3 airports will operate in the liberated territories and the number of airports in Azerbaijan will increase to 9. This corridor is very useful not only for Azerbaijan, but also for Armenia from an economic point of view. Along with this economic benefit, the result will be long-term stability and prosperity in the South Caucasus. The opening of the Zangezur Corridor will lead to the opening of the borders and transport routes of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia, which have been closed for many years. The Minister of Economy of Armenia noted that the opening of this corridor will allow Armenia to increase its GDP by 30 percent within 2 years. The Zangezur Corridor is a kind of way out of recession for Armenia, which is experiencing economic recession and whose external debt exceeds 60 percent of GDP, and the restoration of the corridor will make an important contribution to its economic development. As a result of this, South Caucasus countries will get economic benefits and will be able to create a fertile ground for long-term peace.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sadiyev, Y. (2023, June 2). Azerbaijan and Armenia reached an agreement on the railway. modern.az. <https://modern.az/olke/414426/azerbaycan-ve-ermenistan-demir-yolu-ile-baghli-razilashdi-beyanat/>

<sup>7</sup> Vugar Bayramov. (2021, August 16). There is an economic recession in Armenia. <https://oxu.az/politics/521101>

## 5. Economic and political advantages

The transport sector is one of the main factors of an efficiently developing economy. Building an efficient transportation corridor reduces transportation time, shortens transportation distance, and creates a number of opportunities. All these factors make a positive contribution to the increase in the volume of trade, the increase in income through customs fees, and the development of tourism and other sectors. Despite significant differences in infrastructure and efficiency levels in the transport systems of developing and industrialized countries, technological development in various modes of transport greatly benefits both socio-economic development and wealth accumulation. The affordability of the transportation system allows the economy to develop an optimal allocation of scarce resources, ensures the proper functioning of society as a whole, and maximizes wealth. One of the important factors for creating an efficient transport corridor and transport hubs is the favorable geographical location. The geographical location of the South Caucasus region has enabled it to be used as an intersection of transport hubs throughout history and has helped to achieve important progress in the development of this region. Ancient trade routes from west to east and north to south and the modern TRASEKA (Silk Road) pass through this area. The political instability in the South Caucasus also seriously hindered the development of transport corridors. The opening of the Zangezur corridor will bring high economic benefits not only to Azerbaijan but also to Armenia. This corridor will become the main part of the North-South and Middle corridor and will contribute greatly to the development of the region. The opening of this corridor, along with economic benefit, will lead to a serious development in the path of permanent establishment of peace and normalization of relations in the region. In order to restore peace, it is important to restore communication, which can be done through the Zangezur corridor. The opening of the corridor will improve Armenia's relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, which is a great opportunity for Armenia, whose economy is not in a good state. Azerbaijan's location at the intersection of transport corridors creates ample opportunities for Azerbaijan, whose main priority is to develop the non-oil sector, ensures a continuous flow of investments and, in the end, creates conditions for further strengthening of the economy. The port of Alat Deniz has the potential to receive 15 million tons of goods and 100,000 containers, and work is underway to further increase its volume in the future and turn it into one of the largest ports of the Caspian Sea. The development of this port is of special importance because the more Azerbaijan, a transit country in the corridor, develops its transport system and potential, the more cargo can be transported and, as a result, the volume of income can be increased. With the opening of the Azerbaijan Zangezur Corridor, which is the junction of the North-South and Central transport corridors, the development will reach a high level. Thus, the opening of this corridor will ensure the shortest transportation distance from East to West and will lead to further increase in

the volume of cargo transportation, which will lead to an increase in the volume of transit transportation collections, an increase in the trade volume of the region, and ultimately, an acceleration of economic development. Azerbaijan is doing a number of works towards the construction of this corridor and these works are ongoing. Most of the construction of the Horadiz-Aghband road has been completed, and important works are underway to build other sections. The economic importance of this corridor is highly valued for the region, so that in 2022, China's trade volume with Turkey was 44 billion 635 million dollars, and the trade volume between the countries of the European Union was 856 billion dollars, and these statistics are increasing every year. From these statistics, it can be expected that the integration of the Zangezur Corridor into the Middle Corridor will bring great benefits to the economy of Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus countries as a whole. Although not all of these trade links are carried out by land, some of them are transported by air and sea, but the overall volume of land transport is high, which is related to the fact that land transport is cheaper than sea transport. The Middle Corridor project has been accelerated in recent times by the Russia-Ukraine war. Russia's loss of access to the European space has made the question of redirecting trade and other transport from China to Europe and vice versa even more urgent, and considering the size of the trade volume, the importance of this corridor is increasing. Zangezur Corridor will become the main component of this corridor and thanks to this corridor, the shortest transport corridor from east to west will be provided. Considering the importance of the distance in transportation and the huge volume of trade between the mentioned countries and the union, this corridor will greatly contribute to the development of the region. This corridor is of high importance for Armenia, which its economy is in decline. The Minister of Economy of Armenia noted that the opening of the corridor will lead to a 30% increase in Armenia's economy, which means a very serious growth and a way out for a country whose foreign debt is more than 60% of GDP. The opening of the corridor does not mean the closing of any road or the border between the states, however rather means the increase of communication and the establishment of peace in the region, that is, along with this corridor, the traditional corridors will also be able to continue their activities. Through the Zangezur Corridor, the relations of all the countries of the Turkic world will increase and it will be possible to achieve rapid development. Thus, the economic and strategic unification of the Turkish states with a nominal GDP of more than 1.1 trillion dollars is envisaged. Not only for the Middle Corridor, but also for the North-South transport corridor, the importance of the Zangezur Corridor is high, as the war between Russia and Ukraine, which started and continues today, created problems in the transport with the Black Sea. As part of the sanctions package, Russia was also deprived of access to Europe. In such a case, Russia has already started looking for other partners and other corridors, and the North-South project, which has continued with a weak growth rate until now, has become of

special importance, and a number of works have been done in this context in recent times. Before the recent political events, the North-South Corridor did not attract much interest. The incident at the Suez Canal has already become a signal for the development of the North-South Corridor, which is an alternative to the traditional corridor. However, this interest still did not reach the desired level. In the later period, the war and sanctions between Russia and Ukraine increased the interest of Russia in this corridor. Russia, which has lost its access and connections to Europe, is already trying to reduce the impact of the damage to its economy by increasing trade and other relations with other countries. In 2022, Russia's trade volume with India increased sharply to \$30 billion, and the volume of oil supplies from Russia to India increased 36 times. The continuation of this increase is not an exception, and considering that the war continues, this possibility increases even more. There was also an increase in the trade volume between Russia and Iran, and the volume of trade between the two countries increased by 20 percent and reached 4.9 billion dollars. The most serious problem for Russia, which has been excluded from the SWIFT system, has been payment difficulties, but India has adopted the Russian payment system and conducts trade using it. Iran was already excluded from the SWIFT system, and therefore there were no obstacles to its trade with Russia. Looking at all these statistics, one can see the magnitude of the economic potential of the North-South corridor, and these statistics are expected to increase further as a result of the ongoing war and sanctions. Through the Zangezur corridor, Russia will be able to get a short and convenient way to Turkey and other countries. Considering that there is a trade relationship between Russia and Turkey worth 68 billion in 2022, this corridor is also of economic importance for Russia. Through this corridor, Russia will get an alternative route not only to Turkey, but also to the Middle East through Turkey. Considering that Armenia is Russia's main trade partner in the region, this corridor will enable Russia to reach Armenia by short route. Already in modern times and in the current political situation, land transport, especially rail transport, has a greater rate of development compared to sea transport. The North-South Corridor will allow considerable time savings compared to the traditional corridor, which can be transported in 15-24 days through the North-South Corridor. (Vinokurov, E., Ahunbaev, A., Shashkenov, M., Zaboev, A. 2021). In addition, it is expected to save \$2,500 for each 15-ton cargo in the preliminary assessment. Work is underway to improve all networks, including the railway network, in the direction of the North-South transport corridor, and a part of the Rasht-Astara railway has been completed and work is underway to finalize the remaining part. This railway will restore the missing part of the North-South Corridor and increase the efficiency, where freight is currently unloaded and loaded onto trucks and then reloaded onto the train, causing additional cost and delay. According to calculations, an improvement in the quality of the railway by 0.1 points, with all other indicators remaining equal, the average increase in the volume of foreign trade is expected

to be 5.8 percent. (Vinokurov, E., Ahunbaev, A., Shashkenov, M., Zaboev, A. 2021) All according to these indicators, the correction of the missing part of the North-South corridor is important both in terms of the corridor and trade volume.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

The Russian-Ukrainian war has had an impact on the transport sector as well as on all sectors, and this impact is increasing as the war continues. The Black Sea is already a danger for transported goods, and the volume of goods transported through this sea has decreased sharply, on the other hand, due to the disconnection between Russia and Europe within the framework of the sanctions applied against Russia, a number of transport problems have arisen, especially for countries that reach Europe through Russia. A number of countries are already interested in implementing existing transport corridor projects and working on new projects. After the restoration of land after the 44-day war and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, the importance and perspective of the South Caucasus region as a transport hub increased even more. This region, which is part of the North-South transport corridor, creates an efficient transport opportunity from Russia to India and vice versa through Azerbaijan. This corridor, which has been planned for a long time, has not been able to develop seriously until recent events due to the fact that Russia and other participating countries are more interested in the traditional corridor through the Suez Canal. However, after the start of the war and the imposed sanctions, the interest of Russia and the corridor countries that trade with it increased sharply. Using this corridor, Russia will have access to India, which has a high trade turnover, and Iran, with which trade relations are growing, as well as, through the expansion of the corridor, East Asian countries, more broadly, the West Asian region, including the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and African countries by connecting to international waters through Iran. Russia has lost access to Europe due to sanctions, and this corridor will create serious economic opportunities for it. The countries of the South Caucasus, especially Azerbaijan, will receive significant funds only from the transit fees through this corridor. Along with the integration into this corridor, Azerbaijan will have access to the countries of the corridor and many other countries through the corridor, and this will help to increase the trade volume and improve the economic situation in general for Azerbaijan, which prioritizes the development of the non-oil sector. Through this corridor, Armenia will be able to have direct access to Russia, its main trade partner in the region, through Azerbaijan. The missing railway line between Rasht and Astara causes cargo to be unloaded and reloaded over this distance, resulting in double time and additional cost, which is undesirable for a transport corridor whose main goal is to reduce time and cost. Currently, this missing part of the railway line is expected to be completed in the next few years. A second corridor that will pass through the South Caucasus region is the Middle Corridor. The Middle Corridor project became especially important after the Russian-Ukrainian war. Through this corridor, it is planned to create a transport corridor from China to Turkey and from there to Europe. The contribution of the corridor to the countries of the region will be unparalleled, considering the volume of trade turnover between China-Turkey-Europe and the level of

development of the countries, this corridor will bring high economic efficiency to the South Caucasus region. This corridor will provide the shortest possible transport corridor from east to west. The construction of the infrastructure for the realization of this project continues, in this framework, more than half of the Horadiz-Aghband railway line has already been completed and will be fully completed in 2024. At the tripartite meeting held in Moscow, a general agreement was agreed on the restoration of the Arazdeyan-Julfa-Ordubad-Mehri-Horadiz railway line and it will be continued. Through this corridor, Azerbaijan will have direct land access to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and Turkey, which will contribute to the increase in trade volume. Through this corridor, Azerbaijan will have the opportunity to expand not only transit fees, but also economic relations with the countries of the corridor, which is a desirable factor for Azerbaijan, which wants to reduce its dependence on the oil sector. Not only Azerbaijan, but Armenia will be able to join this corridor, for a country whose economy is in decline, these transit fees mean an increase in trade volume, access to the countries of the corridor and, as a result, a high economic opportunity. Georgia is one of the participants of the Middle Corridor, and it will achieve economic development with the increase of transit fees and trade volume. Along with all these economic opportunities, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor will greatly contribute to peace in the South Caucasus region and increase the communications of the countries of the region.



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