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ZANGEZUR CORRIDOR: HISTORIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL SYNERGY IN THE NEW ERA

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Abstract

The Zangezur Corridor carries significant economic and strategic weight for the South Caucasus and beyond. The project aims to enhance Azerbaijan's trade with Turkey and Europe by improving logistics infrastructure, reducing transportation costs, and significantly cutting travel time between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. By facilitating more efficient cargo movement, the corridor would strengthen Azerbaijan's position as a transit hub, contributing to its broader economic diversification efforts. Such an expansion would encompass sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and logistics, lessening Azerbaijan's present reliance on energy exports. Additionally, improved land connectivity would reduce dependence on air travel between Baku and Nakhchivan, producing significant cost savings and bolstering regional development initiatives.

Keywords: *corridor, international, coordinating, regional, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia*

The last time the border delimitation process between Azerbaijan and Armenia was carried out was in the 1970s. The original map prepared during the USSR period is kept in Moscow, and copies are kept in Baku and Yerevan. In the current process, it is expected that the same map from the USSR period will be used as the basis for determining the borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In 1929, 657 sq.km of land area of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic – 11 villages, 3 villages of Zangilan district were given to Armenia. In addition, in those years, Aldara, Lehwarz, As-

tazur, Nuvedi and other settlements were also annexed to the territory of Armenia. In 1938, by the decision of the Presidium of the Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee, certain territories around the villages of Sadarak and Karki of Sharur district were transferred to Armenia. Therefore, during this process, the Azerbaijani side should bring to the agenda not the 1974 map, but the territories after the Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan, that is, until 1974" (Borders are becoming clearer: The 1974).

As can be seen, after the start of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, as a result of

the closure of the main land routes between Armenia and its main economic partner, Russia, and also Iran, the blockade of Armenia deepened and Armenians were forced to use only the unreliable Upper Lars road and the poorly maintained highways leading to Iran. Therefore, the opening of the Zangezur corridor will lead to Armenia being freed from the blockade and gaining access to Russia, Iran, and the markets of the Eurasian Economic Union, of which it is a member, by land. Although the November 10 statement mainly led to the restoration of previously existing roads between regional countries, it will also lead to a change in the transport architecture. This is because these roads have been closed for about 30 years, and during this period, the transport policy and regional transport projects implemented in the region were implemented without taking these roads into account ("New Karabakhname: 2022, p. 111).

The Zangezur corridor also provides Armenia with an opportunity to balance its relations with Iran. On the other hand, the corridor could also help Armenia overcome its economic isolation by establishing trade relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. If Armenia develops economic cooperation with Azerbaijan, it will gain access to the East-West corridor, an important communication channel of the Belt and Road project ("We are ready for the result": 2021).

If the planned Caspian gas pipeline between Central Asia and Turkey is realized in the future, Armenia could also be involved in energy transportation as a transit country. In addition, the Yerevan administration could benefit from Azerbaijani investments in the rehabilitation of regional railways.

The Zangezur corridor will reduce Armenia's economic problems in accessing the markets of Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The lack of a land route to its main trading partner negatively affects Armenia's economic relations and security. Moreover, this corridor will allow Armenia to establish a railway connection with another important trading partner, Iran.

As mentioned, one of the issues of particular importance for the Zangezur corridor is the organization of economic relations in a cheap, safe and fast way. Experts who ap-

proach this differently also call the corridor as the "Northern Way", "Middle Way", "Southern Way". More precisely, they arrive at these expressions by classifying the corridor in different directions. For example, according to experts, the "Northern Way" extends to Europe through the territory of Russia, providing transportation to Europe. The "Middle Way" refers to the route covering Central Asia-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey. The "Southern Way", in turn, is a direction covering Iran through the territory of South Asian countries. The most interesting and important aspect of all this is that the common place of all three directions, which are approached differently by different experts, is Azerbaijan. In other words, the route in all three directions intersects in the South Caucasus on the territory of Azerbaijan. This opportunity is formed by the North-South, East-West and South-West transport projects, in which the Republic of Azerbaijan is an active participant. Thus, the roads from Russia via the "North-South" corridor, and from Central Asia via the "East-West" corridor intersect in Azerbaijan, while the "Southern Way" still passes through the territory of Azerbaijan via the "South-West" route (Nasirov A., p. 62–69).

This transit corridor will also increase the potential of the Middle Corridor, a multimodal transport route connecting Europe with China via the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus, which promises to be beneficial for the economies of Armenia and Azerbaijan. For example, Armenia's Economy Minister Vagan Kerobyan predicts that the prevention of transport and economic ties will increase Armenia's GDP by 30 percent within two years. Contrary to some conflicting estimates, the Armenian economy is expected to benefit not only from transit payments for the use of the Zangezur corridor for Azerbaijan's connection with Nakhchivan, but also from its use by many other states, including Russia, for the transportation of goods. Iran, Turkey, Central Asian countries, China, etc. Thanks to the new situation, Armenia will also overcome its isolated position in the region and become part of the Middle Corridor (Vacif Huseynov. Zangezursky corridor – the cornerstone of regional cooperation in the South Caucasus).

The Zangezur corridor offers important functionality in terms of legal and international relations. The relevance of the perspective of the Zangezur corridor is the continuation of regional development in the interests of Azerbaijan. The main advantage of this corridor is that it can create a basis for solving transport issues, as well as providing a regional power (Ibrahimov, Rovshan and Oztarsu, Mehmet Fatih, 2022, p. 49–55).

The corridor's leading role in solving functional issues increases its prospects in

the eyes of many countries. However, Armenia and its partners, ignoring issues related to the prospects of this corridor, prioritize their own political interests, which undermines the regional development of the corridor.

In general, both the Zangezur corridor and the “3+3” platform established in the region will strengthen friendship, neighborliness, and solidarity among the peoples of the region, as well as guarantee sustainable peace, stability, security, tranquility, and development in the region.

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