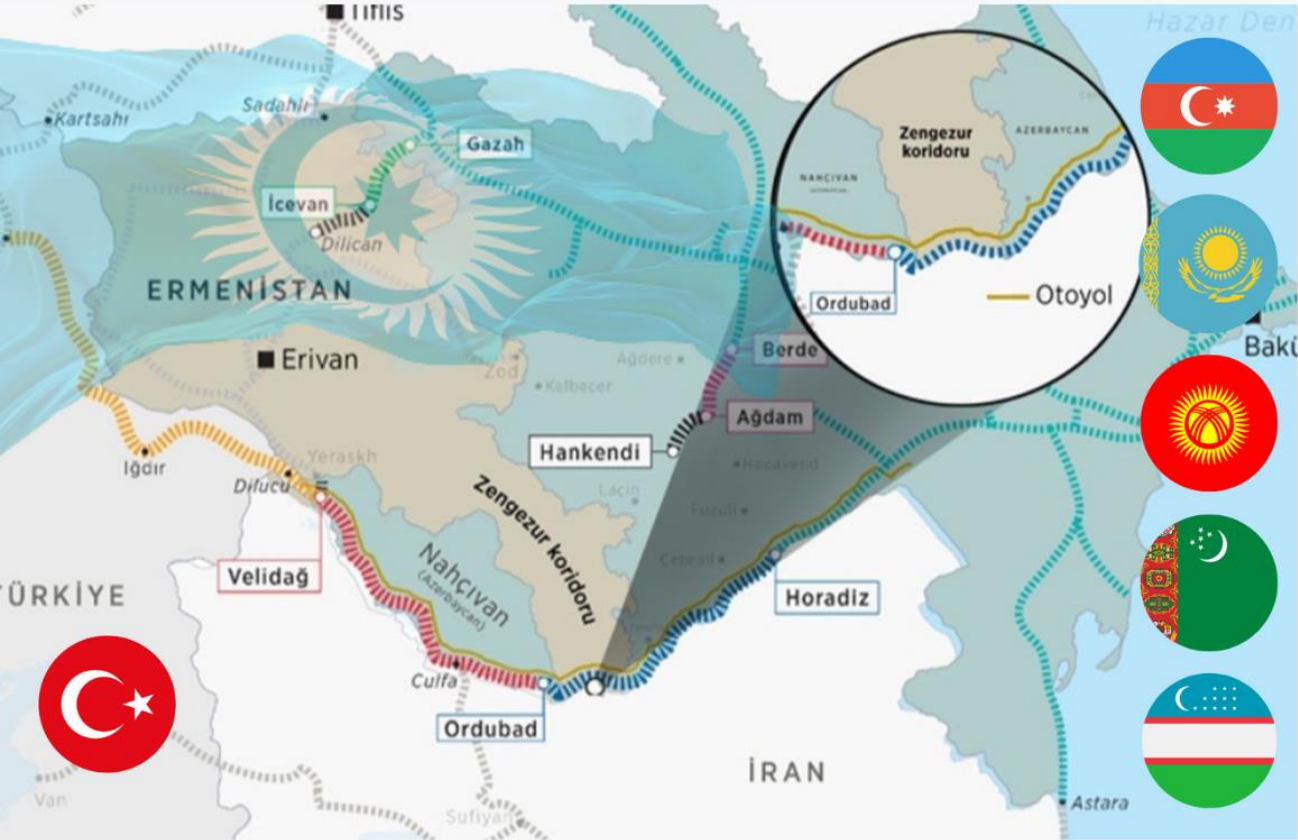


# THE GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE ZANGEZUR CORRIDOR: THE FUTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES

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### THE GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE ZANGEZUR CORRIDOR: THE FUTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES

The Zangezur Corridor is a strategic transportation route that extends from Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, to the city of Kars in eastern Türkiye, passing through the Syunik region of Armenia. This corridor, which has the potential to expand the trade routes between Europe and Asia, has historically served as a bridge among regional cultures, ethnic groups, and states, playing a crucial role not only in the Caucasus but also in enhancing regional connections throughout Eurasia. Due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, this corridor had lost its effectiveness for thirty years. However, after a 44-day war of independence, geopolitical and geostrategic changes have revived its importance. The activation of this corridor has increased the potential of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), the main subject of our study, to become a regional power.

The Zangezur Corridor facilitates commercial and cultural exchanges and contributes to the strengthening of regional cooperation by connecting the territories of Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Russia, Iran, and Armenia, primarily including the Turkic Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan). This corridor, which is of critical importance for the faster and more cost-effective transportation of energy resources and commercial goods to Europe, enhances energy security and commercial diversity.<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the study will discuss the economic benefits and new cooperation opportunities provided by the Zangezur Corridor through facilitating trade, reducing transportation costs, and shortening transit times among the member states of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). In this context, the impacts of the Corridor on energy transmission lines and its contributions to regional energy security will be assessed, and the effect of increased economic integration and trade on OTS will be analyzed.

The second part of the study will examine the effects of the Corridor on regional security and stability, addressing how it will influence the balance of power. The role of the Corridor in border management and security, as well as the policies of regional

and global actors towards resolving potential border disputes, will be analyzed. In this framework, Iran, Armenia, Russia, and OTS member countries, which aim to protect their national interests, will be considered.

In the third part of the study, the focus will be on how the Zangezur Corridor supports political and cultural interaction on both regional and international levels, and how it can facilitate cultural and artistic exchanges among the Turkic republics. Additionally, the role of the Corridor in strengthening the common identity sentiment within the Turkic World will be examined. How this Corridor can serve as a tool in enhancing the soft power of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) on the international stage, and its contributions to

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<sup>1</sup> "Zengezur Koridoru'nun Önemi", (Online: 28 March 2024).  
<https://www.ankasam.org/zengezur-koridorunun-onemi/?lang=en>.

cultural diplomacy activities will be evaluated.

### **The Effects of the Zangezur Corridor on the Organization of Turkic States**

The Zangezur Corridor is a strategic route that will strengthen economic and logistical integration within the Turkic world and provide an uninterrupted transportation line between Asia and Europe. The activation of this Corridor will enable Türkiye to access Central Asia directly without passing through Georgia and Iran. Compared to the existing Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Line, this route is approximately 340 km shorter, which will shorten transportation processes, reduce costs, and invigorate trade among the Turkic states. Moreover, the transportation of Azerbaijan's natural resources from the Caspian region through Türkiye to Europe will bring significant benefits to the Turkish economy and have positive effects on energy supply security.<sup>2</sup> This development will contribute to the diversification of energy resources, supporting the economic and political stability of the regional countries, and accelerating the economic growth of the member countries of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS).

Recent developments such as the Ukraine crisis and the West's aggressive sanctions policy against Russia have seriously disrupted commercial activities from Russia to Europe. In this context, countries looking for alternative transportation routes have turned their attention to the Zangezur Corridor.

Trade between Türkiye and Central Asia largely depends on truck shipments through Iran and Russia. However, additional taxes imposed by Iran on Turkish trucks and the reciprocally increasing transit fees have complicated the trade relations and political dynamics between the two countries, adversely affecting Türkiye's commercial access to Central Asia. The opening of the Zangezur Corridor has provided Türkiye with an alternative route independent from Iran and Russia for trade with the Turkic states of Central Asia.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, the Zangezur Corridor will contribute to increasing the volume of trade among the member countries of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) by facilitating trade, simplifying customs procedures, and reducing transportation costs. The simplification of customs processes and the reduction of transportation times will decrease trade costs and increase trade volume. At the same time, by offering an alternative route for the transportation of Central Asia's energy resources to Europe, it will diversify energy trade and strengthen regional energy security. The Zangezur Corridor will facilitate Türkiye's access to Central Asian markets, deepen economic integration, and encourage regional cooperation and investments. This corridor, of strategic importance, will not only strengthen the position of OTS member countries in the global economy but also contribute to regional prosperity and security.

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<sup>2</sup> Doğudan Batıya Zengezur Koridoru'nun Önemi", (Online: 28 March 2024).  
<https://www.turksam.org/detay-dogudan-batiya-zengezur-koridoru-nun-onemi>

<sup>3</sup> "The Zangezur Corridor and Geopolitical Realities", (Online: 30 March 2024).  
<https://ccbs.news/en/article/7374/>

### Change in Security Dynamics

The reactivation of the Zangezur Corridor has brought about a significant transformation in the regional geopolitical structure. This development presents strategic opportunities for the member countries of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) while producing negative consequences for countries like Iran and Georgia. Before the Second Karabakh War, the route between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan passed through Iran. Shifting the route to pass through Armenia via the Zangezur Corridor will reduce the dependency on Iran for transportation.<sup>4</sup> This geopolitical project, aiming to connect Europe to Asia and China via Azerbaijan and Türkiye, will lead to the severance of Iran's connection with Europe and result in a significant loss for Iran in the Caucasian route.<sup>5</sup> The transportation of energy resources from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan through Azerbaijan to Europe will become easier, leading to a weakening of Iran's central position in energy transit routes. Therefore, the activation of the Zangezur Corridor is considered a development that will cause a decrease in Iran's geopolitical and geostrategic importance on both regional and global levels.<sup>6</sup> Iran's influence over the Turkic world will significantly decrease, leading to the loss of not only economic but also certain political advantages in the region.

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor presents economic and strategic opportunities for the members of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) while also raising concerns among external regional actors. The fact that Iranian media refers to it as the "NATO Corridor," "Turan Corridor," and "Turkic NATO" indicates that this development is perceived not merely as a commercial move but as a geopolitical maneuver. Countries like Iran, Russia, and China consider this corridor as an effort by the West, especially NATO, to expand their regional influence. The activation of this corridor raises concerns about regional security, as it is thought to facilitate NATO's access to strategic points in the region through Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Especially Iran's apprehensive approach to this development from a security and strategic perspective suggests that the strategic positioning of the corridor could shape new security dynamics in the region. While this initiative strengthens the economic integration of the OTS members, it also emerges as a factor that affects regional and global power balances.<sup>7</sup>

As part of these strategic and geopolitical dynamics, Azerbaijan and Türkiye have begun constructing a new pipeline to transport natural gas from İğdır to Nakhchivan, in addition to projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP).<sup>8</sup> This project,

<sup>4</sup> "Iran's Frustrations With the Zangezur Corridor", (Online: 30 March 2024).

<https://jamestown.org/program/irans-frustrations-with-the-zangezur-corridor/>

<sup>5</sup> "Why Iran Opposes Azerbaijan's Zangezur Corridor Project", (Online: 30 March 2024).

<https://gulrif.org/why-iran-opposes-azerbaijans-zangezur-corridor-project/>

<sup>6</sup> "GÖRÜŞ - İran Zengezur Koridoru'na neden karşı?" (Online: 29 March 2024)

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/gorus-iran-zengezur-koridoruna-neden-karsi/3001011>

<sup>7</sup> "İran Neden Zengezur Koridoru'na Karşı?" (Online: 30 March 2024).

<https://iramcenter.org/iran-neden-zengezur-koridoruna-karsi-828>

<sup>8</sup> "İğdır-Nahçıvan Doğal Gaz Boru Hattı, Türkiye ve Azerbaycan'ın enerjideki işbirliğini güçlendirecek", (Online: 29 March 2024).

<https://www.sondakika.com/ekonomi/haber-igdir->

in particular, aims to end Nakhchivan's dependency on Iran for energy, and it is targeted to be completed by the year 2024.<sup>9</sup> This development will eliminate the region's dependency on Iran for energy and will make significant contributions to Europe's energy supply security.<sup>10</sup>

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor is anticipated to weaken Georgia's strategic position, particularly diminishing the significance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. Historically, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the past 30 years has served Georgia's interests; the conflicting parties' dependency on Georgia for transportation has strengthened the country's geopolitical position. As a country with limited economic resources and experiencing political tensions with Russia, Georgia has benefited from the continuation of the conflict. However, the new situation created by the 44-day war and especially the activation of the Zangezur Corridor has negatively impacted Georgia.<sup>11</sup>

For Russia, the Corridor will facilitate direct road access to Armenia through Azerbaijan, allowing for strengthened economic relations with Armenia. Additionally, it will offer Russia an

alternative route to the Middle East via Iran, expanding its regional access. There is a possibility that control of the corridor could be transferred to the Russian Federal Security Service, which would enhance Russia's strategic position in the South Caucasus and reduce its dependency on land transportation through Georgia.<sup>12</sup>

For Armenia, the Corridor represents an opportunity to break the blockade and secure safer trade opportunities with Russia. The existing barriers limiting Armenia's access to Russia and unreliable routes like Upper Lars highlight the importance of this corridor, offering a chance to overcome transportation obstacles. However, Armenia believes that the geopolitical risks of the Zangezur Corridor for the country outweigh its economic benefits, leading to the belief that the Armenian government should delay and, if possible, obstruct the opening of the corridor.<sup>13</sup> The main reason for this is the concern among Armenian experts that the corridor might violate Armenia's territorial integrity and think that the project will isolate Armenia from its trade with Iran.<sup>14</sup>

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor will offer significant benefits for Türkiye and

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<sup>9</sup> "Zengezur Koridoru'na İran alternatifi mi? - DOÇ. DR. GÖKTÜRK TÜYSÜZOĞLU", (Online: 29 March 2024).

<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/olaylar-ve-gorusler/zengezur-koridoruna-iran-alternatifi-mi-doc-dr-gokturk-tuysuzoglu-2131236>

<sup>10</sup> "İğdir-Nahçıvan Doğal Gaz Boru Hattı'nın temeli atıldı", (Online: 29 March 2024).

<https://www.dunya.com/gundem/igdir-nahcivan-dogal-gaz-boru-hattinin-temeli-atildi-haberi-705910>

<sup>11</sup> "Геополитическое значение Зангезурского коридора. (Online: 1 April 2024).

[https://musavat.biz/ru/news/geopoliticheskoe-znachenie-zangezurskogo-koridora\\_993315.html](https://musavat.biz/ru/news/geopoliticheskoe-znachenie-zangezurskogo-koridora_993315.html)

<sup>12</sup> "Геополитическое значение Зангезурского коридора: Еревану ничего не остается, кроме как открыть коридор". (Online: 1 April 2024).

<https://vk.com/@azeordusu-geopoliticheskoe-znachenie-zangezurskogo-koridora-erevanu-ni>

<sup>13</sup> "Геополитическое значение Зангезурского коридора." (Online: 1 April 2024).

[https://musavat.biz/ru/news/geopoliticheskoe-znachenie-zangezurskogo-koridora\\_993315.html](https://musavat.biz/ru/news/geopoliticheskoe-znachenie-zangezurskogo-koridora_993315.html)

<sup>14</sup> "Тупик в начале «Зангезурского коридора". (Online: 3 April 2024).

<https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/31882>

make it one of the most benefited countries among the regional nations. This corridor will provide Türkiye with a direct land connection to Azerbaijan, revitalizing transportation lines that were disrupted due to the Armenian occupation. The current transportation links through Georgia and Iran have increased the distance and costs of transportation. The corridor reduces both distance and costs. It will enable Türkiye's access to Central Asia via the Caspian Sea, namely to the Turkic world. This situation will eliminate Türkiye's dependency on Georgia and Iran, and it will be of strategic importance for establishing and expanding economic, political, and strategic relations among the Turkic world countries.<sup>15</sup> Facilitating the flow of energy resources from Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Turkic states to European markets, this corridor plays a crucial role in terms of energy security and diversity. The activation of this corridor will contribute to building tighter relations among regional countries by supporting regional cooperation and economic integration. Increasing mutual dependency in this process will be a significant factor in enhancing regional stability and prosperity.

### Cultural Integration and Identity Policies

Approximately 40% of Iran's population consists of Turkic people<sup>16</sup>. In this context, discussions related to the opening of the Zangezur Corridor are thought to potentially have significant cultural and

political implications for the Azerbaijani population in Iran. This development could lead to a revitalization of historical and cultural relations with Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the activation of this Corridor is considered to possibly strengthen nationalist sentiments within the Azerbaijani community in Iran. In this light, Iran's opposition to the opening of the Corridor is also seen to be related to identity politics. This is because there are concerns that a strengthened Azerbaijan could influence its own ethnic Azerbaijani population.<sup>17</sup>

Abdullah Eren, the President of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, has stated that the deep relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan is expected to spread to other Turkic states such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan with the opening of the Zangezur Corridor. This indicates that the Corridor will play a supportive role in cultural integration.<sup>18</sup>

Azerbaijan's President Aliyev has remarked that the geographical fragmentation experienced with the taking of Zangezur from Azerbaijan has been overcome with decisions made in Nakhchivan, which will strengthen the unity of the Turkic world. He has expanded the motto "One nation, two states!" to emphasize the spirit of "7 States, One Nation," highlighting the belief that the solidarity of Turkic states will give

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<sup>15</sup> Геополитическое значение Зангезурского коридора: Еревану ничего не остается, кроме как открыть коридор. (Online: 1 April 2024).

<https://vk.com/@azeordusu-geopoliticheskoe-znachenie-zangezurskogo-koridora-erevanu-ni>

<sup>16</sup> Including Turkmens, Qashqais, and other Turkic-speaking groups

<sup>17</sup> "Peace with Armenia Will Further Pan-Turkic Ambitions". (Online: 3 April 2024).

<https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/716-peace-with-armenia-will-further-pan-turkic-ambitions.html>

<sup>18</sup> "Eren: "Bambaşka Bir Türk Dünyası Göreceğiz"". (Online: 3 April 2024).

<https://ytb.gov.tr/haberler/eren-bambaska-bir-turk-dunyasi-gorecegiz>

rise to a new global power, making a more pronounced presence on the world stage.

Aliyev emphasized that this union would bring the Turkic peoples closer not only in economic and political fields but also in cultural and social dimensions. Specifically, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor is seen as a concrete step towards this unity vision, playing a critical role in ending the geographical division of the Turkic world. This development is considered the beginning of a new era in the relations among the Turkic states and with the world, believed to strengthen unity and cooperation while also having the potential to contribute to regional and global peace.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

The reopening of the Zangezur Corridor is a development that will significantly strengthen the economic and logistical integration of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) member countries, creating an alternative trade and energy transfer line between Asia and Europe. This advancement will offer new opportunities in regional and global trade to the Turkic states, encouraging economic integration and cooperation.

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor has also led to transformations in regional security and geopolitical balances, providing economic and strategic advantages to the OTS countries while weakening the strategic positions of Iran and Georgia. The reduction of Iran's influence and the strengthening of the regional position of the Turkic states have

created a significant geopolitical shift. This situation has presented important opportunities for the Turkic states in terms of energy security and economic integration. Playing a supportive role in regional cooperation and stability, it has contributed to the establishment of closer relations among the regional countries and to cultural integration. These developments indicate the emergence of new dynamics in regional and world politics.

Beyond economic revival, the Corridor is also seen as a unifying force reinforcing cultural integration and the “7 States, One Nation” vision. By establishing a direct land connection between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, it goes beyond the current routes through Iran and Georgia, deepening and expanding the cultural, social, and economic ties among the Turkic states. This development holds the potential to promote regional cooperation and prosperity while also contributing to a stronger presence of the Turkic world on the global stage, unified and cohesive. The Zangezur Corridor, more than just a transportation and trade route, stands out as a strategic initiative that will enhance solidarity among the Turkic states, creating significant impacts at regional and global levels.

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<sup>19</sup> “7 Devlet Tek Millet Ruhuyla Hep Omuz Omuz Yürümeye Devam...” (Online: 3 April 2024).

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