

# Black Sea-Caspian Region in Global Context: International Transport Corridors\*

## Küresel Bağlamda Karadeniz-Hazar Bölgesi: Uluslararası Ulaşım Koridorları

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### Abstract

The paper focuses on the Black Sea-Caspian region analysis, its place and role in international relations and world politics. Particular attention is paid to international transport corridors (ITC), as well as factors of stability and security in the region. Since 2013, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) can significantly increase the volume of cargo transportation between Central Asia and Europe. It fits into the EU Global Gateway initiative, which, among other things, provides for investment in the development of logistics links with Asian countries as opposed to the Chinese Belt and Road. Although the Caspian Sea has no access to the World Ocean, it is an important center of transport and trade links, as well as a source of regional cooperation and, at the same time, intense competition. The authors conclude that the conflict in Ukraine and Western sanctions against Russia caused the countries of Central Asia, which generally remain neutral in the conflict, consider TITR as an alternative to the Northern Corridor and began to actively promote this trade corridor bypassing Russia. The Black Sea-Caspian region is an integral element of existing geopolitical configurations. Such territories can be as zones of interaction between socio-cultural and political flows, as well as an "apple of discord" between rival world actors. In the context of a new world order formation, favoring of one or another of the competing logistics projects can lead to a transformation of trade over a vast territory and a change in existing centers of power as well.

**Key Words:** Black Sea, Caspian Sea, international transport corridors (ITC), Middle corridor, TRACECA

### Öz

Bu çalışma, Karadeniz-Hazar bölgesinin analizi ile bu bölgenin uluslararası ilişkiler ve dünya siyasetindeki yeri ve rolüne odaklanmaktadır. Özellikle Uluslararası Ulaşım Koridorlarına (ITC) ve bölgedeki istikrar ile güvenlik faktörlerine özel önem verilmektedir. 2013 yılından bu yana Trans-Hazar Uluslararası Taşımacılık Güzergâhı (TITR), Orta Asya ile Avrupa arasındaki yük taşımacılığı hacmini önemli ölçüde artırma potansiyeline sahiptir. Bu güzergâh, Avrupa Birliği'nin Küresel Geçit (Global Gateway) girişimiyle uyumlu olup, Asya ülkeleriyle lojistik bağlantıların geliştirilmesine yönelik yatırımları içermekte ve Çin'in Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi'ne alternatif oluşturmayı hedeflemektedir. Hazar Denizi'nin açık denizlere doğrudan bağlantısı bulunmamakla birlikte, önemli bir ulaştırma ve ticaret merkezi olmasının yanı sıra bölgesel iş birliği için bir zemin ve aynı zamanda yoğun rekabetin yaşandığı bir alan niteliğindedir. Yazarlar, Ukrayna'daki savaş ve Batı'nın Rusya'ya uyguladığı yaptırımların ardından, genel olarak bu çatışmada tarafsız kalan Orta Asya ülkelerinin TITR'yi Kuzey Koridoruna alternatif olarak değerlendirmeye başladıklarını ve bu ticaret güzergâhını Rusya'yı baypas edecek şekilde aktif biçimde teşvik ettiklerini ileri

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sürmektedir. Karadeniz-Hazar bölgesi, mevcut jeopolitik yapıların ayrılmaz bir unsurudur. Bu tür bölgeler, sosyo-kültürel ve politik akımların kesişme noktası olabilecekleri gibi, rakip küresel aktörler arasında bir "çekişme alanı" (nifak elması) da olabilirler. Yeni bir dünya düzeninin şekillenmekte olduğu bu süreçte, rekabet halindeki lojistik projelerden birinin tercih edilmesi, geniş bir coğrafyada ticaret yapılarının dönüşmesine ve mevcut güç merkezlerinin değişimine yol açabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Karadeniz, Hazar Denizi, Uluslararası Ulaşım Koridorları (ITC), Orta koridor, TRACECA

## Introduction

The Black Sea–Caspian region, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, has long served as a pivotal geopolitical and geo-economic zone in world affairs. Bordered by Russia, Türkiye, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, the region possesses unique strategic character, functioning simultaneously as a buffer zone, an energy corridor, and a theater of geopolitical rivalry among global and regional powers. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent emergence of independent states in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, the significance of this region in international relations has grown steadily, shaped by a complex interplay of interests surrounding energy resources, transport connectivity, security challenges, and the evolving global order<sup>1</sup>. The region's strategic importance is particularly evident in its function as a land bridge connecting East and West. In this context, the development of international transport corridors (ITCs) has become a focal point for economic cooperation and political competition. One of the most significant of these projects is the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), also known as the Middle Corridor, which links China and Central Asia with Europe via the Caspian Sea, South Caucasus, and the Black Sea. Since its inception in 2013, the TITR has attracted increasing attention as a viable alternative to the Northern Corridor that traverses Russia. This trend has accelerated markedly since 2022 due to the war in Ukraine and the Western sanctions against Moscow, which have disrupted traditional trade routes and prompted regional actors to recalibrate their logistical strategies<sup>2</sup>.

Although the Caspian Sea is a landlocked basin, its geopolitical and geo-economic weight is substantial. It serves not only as a hub for energy extraction and export but also as a vital link in Eurasian transit chains. The construction of modern transport infrastructure, including railways, ports, and ferry services, along the TITR has helped bolster the regional connectivity of

1 Tracey German, *Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives?*, Routledge, London. 2012. p. 45-48

2 Paulo Aguiar, "The Middle Corridor: A Route Born of the New Eurasian Geopolitics", *Geopolitical Monitor*, 2025, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/the-middle-corridor-a-route-born-of-the-new-eurasian-geopolitics/>

landlocked Central Asian states, enhancing their access to global markets<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the Black Sea region complements this connectivity by offering maritime access to European ports, reinforcing the synergy between the Caspian and Black Sea transport systems. The Black Sea region, in this context, complements and reinforces the strategic value of the Caspian basin. It serves as the maritime gateway to Europe, linking regional transport corridors to key ports in Romania, Bulgaria, and beyond. The synergy between the Caspian and Black Sea basins is particularly significant in the current geopolitical climate, where access to reliable, politically neutral trade corridors is increasingly vital. As such, the interconnectedness of these two basins enhances the resilience of Eurasian supply chains and offers strategic leverage to transit states seeking to assert greater autonomy in their foreign and economic policies<sup>4</sup>.

The evolving significance of this region is best understood within the broader context of global competition among great powers. The European Union's Global Gateway initiative, launched in 2021, and China's expansive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are both deeply engaged in reshaping the infrastructure and trade patterns across Eurasia. The former seeks to create transparent and sustainable transport and energy links that diversify Europe's connectivity with Asia, while the latter emphasizes Chinese-led investment in roads, railways, and ports under a Sino-centric vision of globalization. The TITR finds itself at the intersection of these grand strategies, symbolizing a strategic battleground where economic cooperation, political alignment, and infrastructural development converge<sup>5</sup>. In addition to economic considerations, the region is also marked by profound security concerns. Ethnic conflicts, frozen disputes, terrorism, and the activities of extra-regional powers have rendered the region a contested and volatile space. The crisis in Ukraine has only exacerbated these tensions, redefining alignments and alliances across the Black Sea-Caspian corridor. In particular, Central Asian states, while officially neutral, have sought to minimize their connection on Russian transport infrastructure by investing in the TITR and strengthening cooperation with Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and the European Union<sup>6</sup>.

The current study aims to examine the contemporary strategic relevance of the Black Sea-Caspian region in light of these transformations. Special em-

- 3 John C. K. Daly, "Trade along Trans-Caspian International Transport Route Surges", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 22, Issue: 9, January 28, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/program/trade-along-trans-caspian-international-transport-route-surges/>
- 4 Stefan Meister, "Comprehensive Security in the Wider Black Sea Region: The Connection with the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea", *Springer Nature*, 2024, p. 195
- 5 Jonathan Hillman, *The Emperor's New Road: China and the Project of the Century*, Yale University Press, Connecticut, 2020, p. 113-115
- 6 J. Rentschler, A. Reinhardt, R. Elbert, D. Hummel, "The Trans-Caspian Corridor – Geopolitical implications and transport opportunities", *Journal of Transport Geography*, Volume: 125, 2025, p. 3-4.

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phasis is placed on the role of international transport corridors, particularly the TITR, in fostering economic connectivity, geopolitical realignment, and regional stability. By analyzing infrastructural developments, regional cooperation patterns, and the strategic calculations of major global actors, this paper seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the region's place in international relations. It also reflects on how the favoring of one transport corridor over another can lead to far-reaching implications for trade flows, political alliances, and the architecture of global power.

### The Geopolitical Importance of Black Sea-Caspian Region

The Black Sea-Caspian region occupies a critical geopolitical position at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. This region not only serves as a key arena for international diplomacy and power competition but also plays a pivotal role in global trade and energy flows, thanks to its position as a critical hub for international transport corridors. The region's transport infrastructure, including both maritime and land-based routes, is essential for connecting major economic zones in Europe, Central Asia, and the Far East<sup>7</sup>. Given its geographic location, the Black Sea-Caspian region serves as a strategic bridge linking the energy-rich lands of Central Asia with key markets in Europe and Asia. This makes the region indispensable in the context of global energy security. The transportation routes that pass through this region are essential for the flow of oil, gas, and other critical commodities. These international transport corridors—such as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and the Caspian Sea's extensive shipping lanes—are vital for maintaining the smooth transit of goods, energy, and trade across continents<sup>8</sup>.

The region's geopolitical importance is heightened by the ongoing competition among global and regional powers; each seeking to influence the development of these corridors and secure their control over vital trade routes. Such countries as Russia, Türkiye, Iran, and China, along with the European Union and the United States, are deeply invested in the region, both for its resources and for its strategic access points. These powers have recognized the region's potential as a transit hub that not only facilitates trade but also enables them to project their influence and secure their economic interests<sup>9</sup>.

The geopolitical dynamics surrounding transport corridors in the Black Sea-Caspian region are further complicated by issues of regional security,

7 Georgi Chankov, "The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route through the Caspian region", *Confucius Institute University of Veliko Tarnovo*, Volume:1, April 2023, p. 337.

8 Paul Kubicek, "Energy politics and geopolitical competition in the Caspian Basin", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Volume: 4, Issue: 2, July 2013, p. 174.

9 Adem Çakır, "Contemporary Rivalry in Central Asia: Challenges and Opportunities", *Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi - Journal of Eurasian Inquiries*, Volume: 9(1), 2020, p. 79-80.

sovereignty, and infrastructure development. Countries in the region, such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, have invested heavily in their transport infrastructure to ensure their place in the global supply chain and to benefit from increased trade and investment. Yet, the development of such infrastructure often faces challenges related to regional rivalries, territorial disputes, and external pressures from competing global powers seeking to establish their dominance over key trade routes<sup>10</sup>. As the region continues to evolve within the global context, its strategic significance will likely only increase. The Black Sea-Caspian region's location as a central nexus for international transport corridors, its vital role in the movement of energy resources, and its position as a zone of great power competition all ensure that it will remain a focal point for global geopolitics in the coming decades.

## The International Transport Corridors in The Black Sea-Caspian Region

In today's world, we observe a high dynamism of processes and events, which sometimes introduces political turbulence and economic volatility. One of the most important transformations taking place literally before our eyes is a significant shift in the Eurasian transport logistics. The formation of new transport routes between East and West, as well as the modernization of old ones, is one of the main trends in the development of the global transport market. In the context of global geopolitical changes and rapid growth of trade between Europe and Asia, the Black Sea-Caspian region is becoming a key logistical hub. For instance, in the early 2000s, European countries' exports to China, Japan and South Korea amounted to \$4 trillion, while the return flow exceeded \$51.3 trillion, with China accounting for \$29.3 trillion. According to forecasts, by 2030, the volume of Eurasian trade will grow by 45%, reaching \$13.3 trillion, and cargo transportation will increase to 6.7 billion tons<sup>11</sup>. Sanctions, conflicts, and the search for alternative routes have led to a revision of traditional logistics chains, which has increased the importance of international transport corridors in this region.

## The Caspian-Black Sea Corridor

The Caspian-Black Sea Corridor is a key transport route that connects the Caspian region with the Black Sea, ultimately extending to Europe. This corridor includes land-based routes such as railways and highways, as well as vital

10 Shahin Ulviyya, "Benefits of Caspian-Black Sea International Transport Route involving four countries", *Azernews*, July 22, 2024, <https://www.azernews.az/analysis/228954.html>

11 B. Kussubayev, Z. Liu, T. Berdzenishvili, "Concept for the Development of Container Transport in TRACECA Countries up to 2030", *Permanent Secretariat of the IGC TRACECA*, 2021, [https://traceca-org.org/fileadmin/fm-dam/pdfs/til\\_igcmeets/15th/eng/Appendix\\_11\\_Concept\\_2030\\_eng.pdf](https://traceca-org.org/fileadmin/fm-dam/pdfs/til_igcmeets/15th/eng/Appendix_11_Concept_2030_eng.pdf)

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maritime connections across the Caspian Sea. The Caspian-Black Sea Corridor is strategically important because it provides a direct route for the movement of energy resources from the Caspian Basin, particularly oil and natural gas, to international markets in Europe. It is vital for enhancing trade and economic ties between the Caspian states and it strengthens Europe's energy security by providing access to alternative supplies. The route aimed to facilitate the movement of goods between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea through a combination of maritime, rail, and road transportation, thereby enhancing trade between Europe and Asia. The expected reduction in transportation costs and delivery times was noted to make the corridor more efficient and economical<sup>12</sup>.

The Caspian Sea - Black Sea corridor, announced in 2018, is planned as a new route connecting Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania through the ports of Turkmenbashi, Baku, Poti/Batumi, and Constanta. In the future, branches to other Black Sea harbors, such as in Bulgaria or Türkiye, are possible. The Caspian - Black Sea corridor is part of the Middle Corridor, which will be discussed further. It fits into the European Union's Global Gateway initiative, aimed at "strengthening the influence and attractiveness of European markets, goods, and services for counterparties around the world<sup>13</sup>." The project also envisages investing in the development of logistical connections with Asian countries, as a counterweight to China's "Belt and Road Initiative."

On March 4, the foreign ministers of Romania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkmenistan convened in Bucharest for their first-ever quadrilateral meeting. During this historic gathering, the ministers issued a joint declaration emphasizing their shared commitment to mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders. The Bucharest discussions also addressed several key matters, most notably the proposal to establish a multimodal transport corridor connecting the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions—an initiative formally referred to as the Caspian Sea-Black Sea International Transport Corridor<sup>14</sup>.

The convergence of broad national interests brought the four participating countries together in support of the Caspian-Black Sea corridor. For instance, Turkmenistan viewed this and other trans-regional transit routes as vital outlets for reaching potential new markets, particularly for its liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports. Exporting LNG to Europe via Romania's Port of

12 Evgeny Vinokurov, Asset Adakhayev, "Infrastructure in Eurasia: Short-Term and Medium-Term Trends", *EDB Reports and Working Papers*, 2024, p. 54-55

13 The Official Website of The Council of the European Union, "The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership", <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10113-2007-INIT/en/pdf>

14 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, "Bucharest Statement", March 4, 2019, <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/articles/355>

Constanța was likely to offer significant benefits to Turkmenistan, especially as it aimed to diversify both its customer base and export routes<sup>15</sup>. Romania, on the other hand, was eager to establish the Port of Constanța as a strategic hub for shipping goods from Asia to the EU, as well as for exporting European goods to the broader Black Sea and Caspian regions. Additionally, some analysts suggested that the new route could potentially be utilized by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for cargo transportation. Azerbaijani officials, too, expressed their enthusiasm regarding the signing of the quadrilateral agreement for the new transit corridor. They had particularly emphasized that through the development of this corridor, Romania could become a new gateway to the EU market for Baku. During the opening ceremony, former Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov stated that the Caspian Sea–Black Sea International Transport Route “could contribute to the further advancement of cooperation among our countries and other stakeholders in transportation, transit, and logistics.”<sup>16</sup> For years, Azerbaijan was actively promoting a number of cross-border projects to boost the region’s transit potential, particularly through East-West, North-South, and South-West transportation corridors.

### The Lapis Lazuli Corridor

Some experts believe that connecting the two seas into a single transport corridor will be promising for the development of economic and energy partnerships, as well as for trade and investment. It is planned to integrate the so-called Lapis Lazuli<sup>17</sup> transport corridor, connecting Afghanistan with the countries of the Caspian and Black Sea basins and then going to Europe, into the Caspian-Black Sea corridor. The Lapis Lazuli Corridor is a relatively new transport route that connects Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye. It is designed to facilitate trade between Afghanistan and Europe, providing a more direct alternative to the longer, more politically sensitive routes through Pakistan and Iran. The Lapis Lazuli Corridor offers both economic and political benefits by enhancing connectivity in Central Asia and supporting regional integration. The corridor is a vital initiative for landlocked Afghanistan, providing access to global markets and offering a new trade route for the country’s growing agricultural and industrial sectors<sup>18</sup>. The Lapis Lazuli Corridor also holds strategic significance for the Caspian and South Caucasus

- 15 Rahim Rahimov, “Turkmenistan Redirects its Oil Exports from Azerbaijan to Russia”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 16, Issue: 25, February 25, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/turkmenistan-redirects-its-oil-exports-from-azerbaijan-to-russia/>
- 16 “Azerbaijan reaffirms support to dev’t of Caspian Sea – Black Sea Int’l Transport Route”, *Trend News Agency*, March 4, 2019, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3028256.html>
- 17 Khurshid Sultonov, “Lapis Lazuli Corridor and its Future”, *Oriental renaissance: Innovative, educational, natural and social sciences*, Volume: 2, Issue: 2, 2022, p. 756.
- 18 Mohammad Talib Tariq, “The Importance of Lapis Lazuli Corridor for Afghanistan”, *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*, Volume: 3, Issue: 5, October, 2023. p. 277.

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states, as it helps to further integrate Afghanistan into the regional economy. Its development fosters cooperation between Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, and it supports both energy and non-energy trade. The corridor's success is pivotal for the economic growth of Afghanistan, enabling it to participate more actively in international trade. However, its future depends on overcoming security challenges in Afghanistan and ensuring smooth cross-border cooperation between the countries involved. This project complements efforts to create new transport routes and expand economic cooperation between regions<sup>19</sup>.

However, the economic viability of the Caspian–Black Sea transport corridor remains questionable due to several persistent challenges. One of the major impediments is the complexity of regional logistics, which stems from underdeveloped transport infrastructure, limited intermodal connectivity, and inconsistencies in port and rail capacities across participating countries. Additionally, the corridor currently lacks a sufficiently diverse and high-volume flow of goods, which undermines its ability to achieve economies of scale and ensure cost-effective operations<sup>20</sup>. This scarcity of tradable commodities and high-demand product categories reduces the corridor's overall appeal to potential investors and stakeholders. Furthermore, the absence of harmonized customs and transit procedures among the corridor's member states significantly delays the movement of goods. The lack of standardized documentation, digitalization, and streamlined border controls results in increased bureaucratic overhead, transit times, and transaction costs, ultimately discouraging commercial use of the route. Crucially, the long-term sustainability and profitability of the Caspian–Black Sea corridor heavily depend on the involvement of major trading economies, particularly India and China. Without the integration of these key global exporters and importers—who could provide the necessary volume and strategic rationale—the corridor is unlikely to attract sufficient economic momentum<sup>21</sup>.

Görüş

## The International North-South Transport Corridor

Furthermore, it should be noted that Moscow, and not without reason, considers the “Caspian Sea - Black Sea” project competitive, and is currently actively developing the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which

- 19 “Lapis Lazuli Güzergahı ve Orta Koridor Girişimi'nin Bütünleşmesi”, *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi*, December 27, 2018, <https://avim.org.tr/tr/Bulten/LAPIS-LAZULI-GUZERGAHI-VE-ORTA-KORIDOR-GIRISIMI-NIN-BUTUNLESMESI>
- 20 Agshin Mukhtarov, “The Trans-Caspian Corridor: the shortest path or a difficult bridge between East and West?”, *Baku Research Institute*, April 14, 2020, <https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/en/the-trans-caspian-corridor-the-shortest-path-or-a-difficult-bridge-between-east-and-west-2/>
- 21 Eric Rudenshiold, “Nine Hard Truths along The Caspian Middle Corridor: Critical Factors facing the Caucasus and Central Asia”, *Caspian Policy Center Special Report*, June 13, 2024, [https://api.caspianpolicy.org/media/ckeditor\\_media/2024/06/13/nine-hard-truths-along-the-caspian-middle-corridor.pdf](https://api.caspianpolicy.org/media/ckeditor_media/2024/06/13/nine-hard-truths-along-the-caspian-middle-corridor.pdf)



runs from the seaport of St. Petersburg to one of the largest ports on the west coast of India — Mumbai. The total length is about 7,200 km. The agreement on the creation of the North-South transport corridor was signed in 2002 between Russia, Iran, and India, and then a dozen more countries joined it<sup>22</sup>. Despite its early promise, the corridor had progressed slowly for nearly two decades due to political, logistical, and infrastructural constraints. However, the geopolitical landscape shifted dramatically following the outbreak of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in 2022. As Western sanctions increasingly constrained Russia's access to European markets and traditional logistical routes, the INSTC emerged as a strategic alternative for maintaining trade flows with key partners in the Global South and East. In light of these developments, the Russian government has prioritized investments in the modernization of transit infrastructure, customs simplification, and bilateral agreements along the corridor. Strategic cooperation with Iran and India has also gained momentum, contributing to a significant uptick in projected cargo volumes. According to recent forecasts, Russia aims to double the volume of goods transported along the INSTC by 2030, signaling a clear intent to position this corridor as a central artery in the emerging Eurasian trade network<sup>23</sup>.

### Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor)

Sanctions and military conflicts have led to the redirection of trade flows, which has increased interest in alternative routes through the Black Sea-Caspian region. For example, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (or Middle Corridor) is actively developing. The Middle Corridor<sup>24</sup> is a multimodal route involving two main modes of transport: rail and sea. It connects China and the European Union through Central Asia, the Caucasus, Türkiye, and Eastern Europe<sup>25</sup>. It started operating in 2017, although as a project it was laid down in 2013, when the Coordination Council was created. The route includes 10,000 km of railway networks, 10 seaports, and seventy thousand units of rolling stock. This transport network should reduce the delivery time of goods between China and Europe by three times. The use of this corridor makes it possible to deliver goods faster compared to, for example, the route through the Suez Canal. The Middle Corridor has a route interface with the "Belt and

- 22 Fazel Shahcheragh, "Opportunities and Threats of the North-South Corridor (INSTC) for Iran", *Modern Diplomacy*, March 25, 2025, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/03/25/opportunities-and-threats-of-the-north-south-corridor-instc-for-iran/>
- 23 Evgeny Y. Vinokurov, Arman Ahunbaev, Alexander I. Zaboiev, "International North-South Transport Corridor: Boosting Russia's "pivot to the South" and Trans-Eurasian connectivity", *Russian Journal of Economics*, Volume: 8(2), 2022, p. 162-163
- 24 Faridun Sattarov, "The Emerging Potential of the Middle Corridor", *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, Issue: 21, 2022, p. 201.
- 25 Arina Eduardovna Akinfieva, "Transkaspiskii mezhdunarodnyi transportnyi marshrut: sostoianie, perspektivy, konkurentsia s rossiiskimi magistraliami", *Rossiiskii institut strategicheskikh issledovaniï (RISI)*, <http://riss.ru/analitics/26406/>

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Road Initiative”<sup>26</sup>. In 2025, it is planned to launch the “Digital Trade Corridor” platform<sup>27</sup>, which will combine document flow, customs clearance, and cargo tracking along the entire route into a single ecosystem.

The project has several important advantages. First of all, it strengthens economic and cultural cooperation between the participating countries, improves and effectively uses railway transport, and increases the throughput capacity of the Caspian countries. This provides a significant impetus for the development of these countries. Of particular note is the importance of the Caspian region, which is one of the most dynamically developing. In terms of its reserves, it is one of the main energy centers of Eurasia. The Caspian Sea is of great importance, primarily given its strategic location in the center of Eurasia, at the intersection of transport and energy arteries, as well as the large number of minerals and unique bioresources in its waters. From the point of view of transport and logistics capabilities, the region could become “one of the largest hubs for transcontinental transportation in Eurasia”<sup>28</sup>.

However, to date, the main goal of the Middle Corridor has not been fully realized, as this route has proven to be in little demand by China, which supplies goods to the European Union by sea and by land, which runs through Kazakhstan and the European part of Russia or through Siberia. Another problem is the use of ferry crossings, which reduce the speed of deliveries. Also difficult for transportation is the section passing through the Black and Caspian Seas. The transshipment of cargo in this part greatly increases the cost of transportation due to warehouse rentals while waiting, additional loading and unloading operations, and the cost of the crossing itself. In addition, we note such a problem as crossing a large number of national borders with all the ensuing consequences<sup>29</sup>.

Based on this, the competitiveness and economic feasibility of such a route project and its complete alternative to the Trans-Siberian Corridor are doubtful. The cost of transit along the Trans-Siberian Railway is 30% lower than the cost of transporting goods along the Middle Corridor, which is un-

- 26 Ejaz Hussain, “The Belt and the Road Initiative and the Middle Corridor”, *Insight Turkey*, Volume: 23, Number: 3, 2021, p. 241
- 27 Lada Evgrashina, “Skoreishaia tsifrovizatsiia Srednego koridora nakhoditsia v chisle samykh ostrykh voprosov ego funktsionirovaniia – AZhD”, *Agentstvo mezhdunarodnoi informatsii Trend*, September 20, 2024, <https://www.trend.az/business/transport/3947438.html>
- 28 V.I. Belov, M.A. Nekrasova, “Mezhdunarodnye transportnye koridory v Kaspiiskom regione: bezopasnost- i ustoiчивoe razvitie”, *Informatsiia i innovatsii*, Volume: 17, Issue: 3, 2022, p. 22.
- 29 Arzu Abbasova, Olivia Allison, “Can the Middle Corridor be Europe’s Middle Ground?”, *The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*, March 28, 2025, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/can-middle-corridor-be-europes-middle-ground#:~:text=First%2C%20the%20main%20direction%20of,dominated%20by%20one%20geopolitical%20superpower>

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doubtedly an important factor for shippers. In terms of delivery times, it is also inferior to the Trans-Siberian Railway. Multimodal transportation with a change of modes of transport between rail, road and ferry lead to increased costs, risks to the safety of cargo, as well as slow down its processing compared to rail transportation along the Eurasian route through Russia<sup>30</sup>.

One of the main challenges facing the Middle Corridor is its limited capacity, which currently amounts to only around 5% of that of the Northern Corridor. A key bottleneck lies in the shortage of transport vessels on the Caspian Sea, as well as a lack of locomotives and rail wagons in Azerbaijan and Georgia. As a result, the surge in freight volume has significantly extended transit times—now averaging up to 40 days, and in some cases even longer. These delays undermine one of the corridor's key advantages: faster delivery compared to maritime routes. In addition, unstable pricing remains a major issue. Increased demand has triggered steep and sometimes sudden rises in transport costs. The lack of pricing transparency, compounded by currency risks, makes it difficult for logistics companies to plan effectively—ultimately diminishing the route's appeal for shippers<sup>31</sup>.

On the positive side of the corridor's development, the route length is 11,000 km. The current throughput capacity is about 6 million tons per year. In 2025, it is planned that this volume will reach 10 million tons per year, which could be in direct competition with the North-South corridor<sup>32</sup>. Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan are interested in this route. For Azerbaijan, this is an opportunity to strengthen its transit role and become a major transport hub. Türkiye, in turn, continues to extend its influence over Azerbaijan and Central Asia. And for Kazakhstan, this is additional investment, the development of transit potential, and, of course, a window to Europe, albeit through Azerbaijan and Türkiye, as well as independence from Russia in the transportation of goods. The development of the Middle Corridor also contributes to increased volumes of supplies between the three countries. Due to the transport corridor, large volumes of Kazakh grain will be supplied to Azerbaijan and Türkiye, and Azerbaijani and Turkish fruits and vegetables will be transported to Kazakhstan<sup>33</sup>.

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- 30 Eurasian Rail Alliance Index, "Analysis and prospects for the Trans-Caspian international transport route", October 4, 2023, <https://index1520.com/en/analytics/analiz-i-perspektivy-transkaspiskogo-mezhdunarodnogo-transportnogo-marshruta/>
- 31 Walter Woldemar, "Challenges and opportunities of the Middle Corridor", *German Economic Team-Newsletter Uzbekistan*, Issue:21, December 2022, [https://www.german-economic-team.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/GET\\_NL\\_UZB\\_21\\_2022\\_en-1.pdf](https://www.german-economic-team.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/GET_NL_UZB_21_2022_en-1.pdf)
- 32 a.g.m.
- 33 Zoltán Egeresi vd., *Connectivity in a Changing World: Turkic States and the Middle Corridor*, Published in partnership and support of the Representation Office of the Organization of Turkic States in Hungary, 2025, p. 16-18

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## TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia)

As we have already noted, international transport corridors in the Black Sea-Caspian region play a key role in the development of economic and geopolitical ties between Europe and Asia, and Türkiye occupies a central place in these processes due to its unique geographical location between East and West and active participation in projects such as TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia). TRACECA provides transport links between Europe and Central Asia via the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea. The aim of the program (founded in 1993) is to strengthen economic relations, trade, and transport in the regions of the Black Sea basin, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia.

The TRACECA aims to develop a comprehensive transport route connecting Europe to Central Asia through the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea. Technologically, the program emphasizes the use of a unified transport document for the entire route and the integration of multiple modes of transportation. This logistical innovation is intended to streamline the movement of goods, reduce bureaucratic barriers, and facilitate more efficient East–West trade<sup>34</sup>. Funded by the European Union, TRACECA is not solely a transportation initiative; it also aspires to foster deeper economic and political integration between the EU and its partner countries. The expected outcomes include improved resource distribution between Western and Eastern states, enhanced investment conditions in the transit countries, and broader scientific and cultural development through increased international cooperation<sup>35</sup>. Türkiye plays a pivotal role in the TRACECA as a strategic bridge between Europe and Asia, leveraging its geographic position to facilitate transport across the Black Sea and further into the Caucasus and Central Asia. As a founding member, Türkiye supports TRACECA's objectives by investing in infrastructure, promoting regional trade, and aligning its transport policies with the program's goals, thereby enhancing its own role as a key transit hub in the East–West corridor<sup>36</sup>. However, one of the most significant obstacles to the successful implementation of TRACECA lies within the Transcaucasian segment of the corridor. Key issues include the absence of a harmonized transportation tariff and persistent delays at border crossings, which hinder the corridor's efficiency and reliability. These structural and administrative chal-

34 Serap Ovalı, "TRACECA Projesi ve Türkiye", *Uluslararası İktisadi ve İdari İncelemeler Dergisi*, Volume: 1, Issue: 1, 2008, p. 160.

35 Alaeddin Yalçinkaya, Mehmet Güzel, "Bölgeselleşme Örnekleri Olarak TRACECA Avrasya Ekonomik Birliği, Yeni İpek Yolu ve Kuşak-Yol. Uluslararası", *Afro-Avrasya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Volume: 6, Issue: 12, 2021, p. 111.

36 a.g.m.

lenges require coordinated policy solutions and substantial infrastructure investment<sup>37</sup>.

The future of the TRACECA program is also closely linked to the trajectory of China's "Belt and Road Initiative". If aligned strategically, a substantial portion of China–Europe cargo could be redirected through the Europe–Caucasus–Asia corridor, thereby increasing TRACECA's relevance within the broader Eurasian transport network. In this context, the variant of the North–South transport corridor that passes through the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan emerges as a particularly attractive route. Its advantages include shorter delivery distances, reduced transit times, and well-developed infrastructure. Nonetheless, post-Soviet states participating in TRACECA continue to face numerous challenges. Bringing transport services up to European standards demands considerable financial investment, particularly in the maintenance and modernization of road and ferry infrastructure across the Caspian and Black Sea regions<sup>38</sup>.

From Russia's perspective, TRACECA poses geopolitical implications, as it facilitates the creation of transport routes that bypass Russian territory. This dynamic has the potential to diminish Russia's traditional influence in the CIS region. Despite these concerns, analytical reports within the CIS also recognize TRACECA as one of the key international transport corridors serving the region's economic connectivity<sup>39</sup>.

### **Türkiye's Interaction with The Caspian-Black Sea Transport Networks**

This project covers the countries of the Black Sea-Caspian region and creates a multimodal transport network that promotes economic growth and improves trade links between the project participants. Türkiye, as one of the most active participating countries in TRACECA, uses its strategic advantages to develop infrastructure and implement ambitious projects. Türkiye has historically been seen as a "bridge" between continents, but Ankara's modern policy goes beyond this metaphor, seeking to turn it into a fully-fledged logistics, energy, and economic hub. As part of this vision, Türkiye is actively developing infrastructure projects that connect the transport networks of the Black Sea-Caspian region with European and Asian markets<sup>40</sup>. One of the most significant infra-

- 37 K.N. Abdullayev, "Development of transport connection of Azerbaijan Republic with European Union's countries on the base of international transit transport projects "East-West" (TRACECA), "North-South" and "South-West", *Vestnik Rostovskogo gosudarstvennogo ekonomicheskogo universiteta (RINKh)*, Volume: 3, Issue: 63, 2018, p. 16.
- 38 G.Z. Mekhtizade, "Vliianie proekta TRASEKA na rasshirenie regional'nykh i mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki", *Sovremennaiia nauchnaia mysl*, Issue: 2, 2019, p. 175.
- 39 V.B. Bazarov, A.A. Atanov, "Evraziiskie tsentral-noaziatskie logisticheskie proekty XXI stoletia", *Vlast*, Issue: 8, 2018, p. 138
- 40 Adem Üzümcü, Sıdika Akdeniz, "Yeni İpek Yolu: TRACECA ve Bakü-Tiflis-Kars Demiryolu Pro-

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structure projects related to TRACECA is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project, which was launched in 2017. This project has become part of the "Iron Silk Road" of the 21st century and has created a new railway corridor connecting Asia and Europe through the South Caucasus. It promotes the strengthening of ties between Türkiye, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, ensuring transport, energy, and communication cooperation<sup>41</sup>. In its first year of operation, the project provided transportation for 1 million passengers and 6.5 million tons of cargo, and by 2034 it is planned to increase these volumes to 3 million passengers and 17 million tons of cargo. Its integration with the Chinese "Belt and Road" initiative strengthens the project's significance on a global level, making it an important element in the Eurasian transport and logistics system<sup>42</sup>.

These initiatives are pivotal for transforming Türkiye into a strategic railway hub along the East-West axis. Two key components underpin this vision: the Middle Transport Corridor, also known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), and the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) Transport Corridor, initially launched in 2009 under the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)<sup>43</sup>. The TITR links China to Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, and Türkiye, bypassing Russia. Meanwhile, the ITI corridor seeks to establish a direct railway connection from South Asia to Europe through Iran and Türkiye. Despite their strategic potential, both corridors face several operational and infrastructural challenges. In particular, the ITI railway has encountered recurring issues, especially in Pakistan, related to outdated infrastructure, bureaucratic delays, and insufficient intermodal integration. These obstacles have limited the corridor's full utilization and efficiency. Nevertheless, with sustained investment, political coordination, and infrastructure modernization, these railway corridors hold significant long-term promise<sup>44</sup>. They could not only enhance regional connectivity and economic integration but also be synergized with strategic maritime (e.g., ports in the Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Arabian Sea) and air transport networks, thereby reinforcing multimodal trade routes across Eurasia. In this context, Türkiye's geographical position and transport diplomacy could yield substantial economic and geopolitical dividends for both itself and the broader region.

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- 41 Elshan Hajizade, "Great Silk Road and The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Project", *Black Sea Scientific Journal of Academic Research*, Volume: 24, Issue: 6, September 2015, p. 8-9
- 42 Shahin Mustafayev, *Strengthening Transport and Energy Connectivity among Turkic States*, Turkic Academy and the Secretariat of Organization of Turkic States (OTS). Astana, Kazakhstan, 2024, p 82.
- 43 Economic Cooperation Organization, "Activation of ECO- ITI Road Corridor A historical achievement for ECO Region", <https://eco.int/activation-of-eco-iti-road-corridor-a-historical-achievement-for-eco-region/>
- 44 T.C. Ulaştırma Bakanlığı, "Ulaştırma Bakanı Karaismailoğlu: İstanbul - Tahran - İslamabad Yük Treni İki Ülke Arasındaki Ticareti Geliştirecek", January 05, 2022, <https://www.uab.gov.tr/haberler/ulastirma-bakani-karaismailoglu-istanbul-tahran-islamabad-yuk-treni-iki-ulke-arasindaki-ticareti-gelistirecek>

The TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline) project is the backbone of the European Union's Southern Gas Corridor, aimed at reducing Europe's dependence on Russian gas. TANAP provides transportation of natural gas from the Caspian region through Türkiye to Europe and is considered the "Silk Road of Energy". The first gas supplies via the pipeline began in 2020, which was an important step in implementing Türkiye's strategy to become an energy hub. Türkiye is also seeking to attract Turkmen gas to the TANAP project, which will further strengthen its position in the region<sup>45</sup>. In March 2024, Türkiye signed a new agreement on natural gas supplies with Turkmenistan, which was an important achievement in this direction<sup>46</sup>.

Türkiye is not limited to transport and energy projects, but also seeks, as a dialogue partner, to strengthen its position within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Particularly relevant is the acceleration of investment in railways through Central Asia and the Caucasus, the intensification of efforts to launch the Zangezur corridor<sup>47</sup>, and the acceleration of the Development Road project<sup>48</sup> jointly with Iraq. On April 22, 2024, the relevant ministers of Iraq, Türkiye, the UAE, and Qatar signed a memorandum of understanding on the Development Road transport corridor project, which will connect Europe with Southeast Asian countries through Türkiye, Iraq, and the ports of the Persian Gulf. The new corridor is intended to be an alternative to routes passing through the Suez Canal. The construction of a railway line between the cities of Shalamchek (Iran) and Basra (Iraq) could allow the linking of the International North-South Transport Corridor with the Development Road corridor and access to the large port of Grand Faw, currently under construction south of Basra.

## Middle Corridor and Türkiye

The blockage of the container ship The Ever Given in the Suez Canal in March 2021 had a negative impact on world trade and once again showed how important alternative routes are<sup>49</sup>. However, the implementation of existing ITCs

- 45 Liaman Rasat Gyzy Godzhaeva, "Proekt TANAP i ego geostrategicheskoe znachenie", *Azmut nauchnykh issledovaniy: ekonomika i upravlenie*, Volume: 10, Issue: 1(34), 2021, p. 125
- 46 Ministerstvo nefti i gaza Turkmenistana, "Turkmenistan i Turtsiia podpisali dokumenty o sotrudnichestve v gazovoi sfere", 2024, <https://www.oilgas.gov.tm/index.php/ru/posts/news/10078/turkmenistan-i-turtsiya-podpisali-dokumenty-o-sotrudnichestve-v-gazovoy-sfere>
- 47 Aysegul Ketenci, "3 questions – importance of Zangezur corridor for the region explained", *Anadolu Agency*, December 21, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/3-questions-importance-of-zangezur-corridor-for-the-region-explained/2769019>
- 48 Alaaldin Ranj, "Iraq's Development Road Project: A Path to Prosperity or Instability?", *The Middle East Council on Global Affairs*, October 2024, <https://mecouncil.org/publication/iraqs-development-road-project-a-path-to-prosperity-or-instability/>
- 49 Vivian Yee, James Glanz, "How One of the World's Biggest Ships Jammed the Suez Canal", *The New York Times*, July 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/17/world/middleeast/suez->

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and the formation of new corridors involves both international cooperation and fierce competition, a clash of geopolitical interests between regional and global centers of power. For example, the Middle Corridor, as an alternative to the Northern Corridor (passing through Russia) and the Southern Corridor (passing through Iran), is important for the integration of China and Europe. Experts on international trade routes and international economic security put forward various arguments. Some believe that the most trouble-free route that will transport goods from China to Europe and the Middle East by land is precisely the Middle Corridor. They note that the roads and railways in the Northern Corridor do not meet modern standards, while the roads and railways of the Middle Corridor countries have higher standards, which makes the Middle Corridor more strategically important and profitable than the Northern Corridor. The Middle Corridor also offers China new opportunities to reduce its dependence on Russia in transportation matters<sup>50</sup>. The Middle Corridor also has many advantages over the Southern Corridor passing through Iran. Goods shipped from China to Europe via the Southern Corridor reach their destination in 14 days, while goods transported along the Middle Corridor arrive at the same destination in 12 days. Other factors include the infrastructure problems of the Southern Corridor, tensions in relations between the United States and Iran and sanctions against Iran, terrorist threats, and the lack of security guarantees that devalue this corridor<sup>51</sup>.

For Türkiye, the Middle Transport Corridor, in addition to trade between China and Europe, has at least two important components. Firstly, Türkiye and China will trade with each other on this route. Over the past 5 years, their trade turnover amounted to \$126 billion. China has become Türkiye's second-largest trading partner and the largest source of imports<sup>52</sup>. Secondly Türkiye and the Turkic countries of Central Asia (including Azerbaijan) also will trade on this route. Their annual trade volume is \$21 billion. At the same time, Türkiye plans to significantly increase trade with both China and the Turkic world<sup>53</sup>.

Türkiye understands that the serious operation of the Middle Transport Corridor will bring significant income, promote the country into the top ten most economically developed countries in the world, strengthen its transit role, and turn the country into a railway hub. This could even have some impact on Türkiye's membership in the EU. The Middle Transport Corridor is very important for

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- 50 Nurettin Akçay, Guo Changgang, "Türkiye's Middle Corridor and China's BRI: Identification and Assessment", *Insight Turkey*, Volume: 25, Issue: 1, 2023, p. 66.
- 51 Araz Aslanlı, Yunis Şerifli, "Zengezur koridoru, Pekin-Londra hattı ve Türkiye'nin artan önemi", *Anadolu Ajansı*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/zengezur-koridoru-pekini-londra-hatti-ve-turkiye-nin-artan-onemi/2254505>
- 52 Mustafa Çalkaya, Murat Birinci, "Türkiye ile Çin arasında 5 yılda 126 milyar dolarlık ticaret yapıldı", *Anadolu Ajansı*, February 29, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkiye-ile-cin-arasinda-5-yilda-126-milyar-dolarlik-ticaret-yapildi/1749455>
- 53 Burcu Pürtul Uçar, "Türk Keneşi'nin İstanbul çıkarması", *Hürriyet Gazetesi*, November 13, 2021, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turk-kenesinin-istanbul-cikarmasi-41938260>

Türkiye, which currently intends to direct some of the huge trade between China and Europe (\$600-700 billion per year) to the Middle Corridor, trying to convince both sides that this route is the fastest and safest compared to other land and sea routes<sup>54</sup>. It is obvious that the Middle Corridor will significantly increase the regional and global importance of the Caspian Sea, intensifying the struggle for the largest lake in the world. However, the insufficient throughput capacity of the Caspian ports could be problematic for Türkiye, China, and Europe.

### The Eurasian Transport Framework

In 2018, the EU published a new policy on connectivity between Europe and Asia, where rail transport is a central element. The EU has invested heavily in regional connectivity: between 2014 and 2020, €1.1 billion was allocated to the Central Asian Development Cooperation Instrument. The European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have also invested €11.3 billion in the region, which is orders of magnitude more than Chinese regional infrastructure investments<sup>55</sup>.

At the same time, the activities of the transport corridors also show factors of mutually beneficial cooperation. In 2021, the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) proposed the concept of the Eurasian Transport Framework. It is based on the idea of the importance of docking and complementing Eurasian transport corridors, thereby increasing transport connectivity, reducing trade costs and simplifying access to international markets - especially for inland areas and states. The Eurasian Transport Framework is considered as a network of interconnected latitudinal and meridional international transport corridors and routes that provide internal and transcontinental connectivity for Eurasian countries. Its foundation consists of international transport corridors in the East-West and North-South directions, with a length of more than 50,000 km, connecting Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The interconnection of corridors creates a synergy effect, which is expressed in an increase in cargo flows by up to 40%<sup>56</sup>.

The Eurasian Transport Framework includes five key international transport corridors - the Northern, Middle, and Southern Eurasian corridors, TRACECA, and "North-South," supplemented by branches and regional routes. However, a prerequisite for this is the proper development of transport and logistics infrastructure in the countries of the region. The development of a soft

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- 54 Hayk Gabrielyan, "Turkey as a Transport Hub: a Vision Strategy for Integrating Regional Infrastructures and Services", *Journal of Political Science: Bulletin of Yerevan University*, Volume: 1, Issue:1, 2022, p. 16
- 55 The Official Website of The European Union, "Connecting Europe & Asia: The EU Strategy", September 26, 2019, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/connecting-europe-asia-eu-strategy\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/connecting-europe-asia-eu-strategy_en)
- 56 From East to West and from North to South: The Future of the Eurasian Transport Network, Eurasian Development Bank MC, June 27, 2024, <https://eabr.org/en/press/news/from-east-to-west-and-from-north-to-south-the-future-of-the-eurasian-transport-network-/>

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infrastructure of the Eurasian Transport Framework is extremely important. In particular, the development of integrated logistics services allows moving from competition between corridors and modes of transport to their interaction. Up to 15% of transport costs can be saved through the implementation of integrated multimodal logistics technologies<sup>57</sup>.

## Conclusion

Thus, international transport corridors in the Black Sea-Caspian region are becoming increasingly important due to a number of sanctions restrictions on traditional routes and the growth of trade between Asia and Europe. However, many projects face serious challenges in their implementation, including the conflict potential in the regions where transport corridors pass, sanctions pressure, and infrastructure limitations (throughput capacity of ports, railways). In addition, given the importance of the transport corridors in the formation of a new world order, we also note serious competition between transport and logistics projects. International actors are interested in promoting their own agenda of integration and development of the regional transport and communication space, considering their national interests. The implementation of one or another of the competing logistics projects can lead to a transformation of trade in a vast territory and a change in the existing economic centers of power in Eurasia.

Türkiye is actively seeking to establish itself as a central node in emerging regional and intercontinental transport corridors—an ambition that stands to significantly enhance its geopolitical influence and generate substantial transit revenues. Until recently, Türkiye's primary focus was on becoming a key railway hub along the East–West axis, primarily through the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route) and the Islamabad–Tehran–İstanbul (ITI) Corridor. However, recent initiatives involving the United Arab Emirates and Russia reveal that Ankara is also pursuing a strategic role in North–South connectivity. In this context, Türkiye has begun laying the groundwork for a new Persian Gulf–Mediterranean Sea Corridor, which not only aims to bypass the Suez Canal, but also avoid routes that traverse the Arabian Peninsula. This shift could significantly alter regional transit dynamics and challenge Egypt's long-standing dominance in maritime trade through the Suez.

From Ankara's perspective, the ongoing instability in Syria and Iraq serves a geopolitical function: it prevents the emergence of more direct transit routes that would sideline Türkiye. Türkiye's transport agenda may also pave the way for a new phase in Turkish–Iranian relations, grounded in mutual interest and strategic necessity. As Türkiye supports the development of cor-

57 New Report Analyses Eurasian Transport Network, The Times of Central Asia, June 28, 2024, <https://timesca.com/new-report-analyses-eurasian-transport-network/>

ridors that run through Iran—namely the ITI corridor and the Persian Gulf–Mediterranean corridor—it offers Tehran a form of strategic compensation for promoting alternative East–West routes like the Middle Corridor, which bypass Iranian territory. These transport initiatives could foster growing interdependence between Ankara and Tehran, increasing their shared interest in maintaining internal stability.

Looking ahead, Türkiye is well-positioned to emerge as a major railway hub not only along the East–West and North–South axes, but also at their various intersections (e.g., East–South or West–North sub-routes). One important complementary initiative is the development of the Black Sea–Mediterranean Corridor, supported by the near completion of a 600-kilometer highway that will reduce travel time between the two seas to just six hours. Plans are also underway for a high-speed rail connection between Samsun and Mersin, which would further consolidate Türkiye’s role in regional connectivity. To realize the full potential of these ambitious projects, political and infrastructural stability is essential not only within Türkiye, but also across the broader region through which these transport corridors pass. In parallel with its transport ambitions, Türkiye is also pursuing the goal of becoming a global energy hub, particularly in the gas sector.

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