The Importance and Prospects of Azerbaijan in the East-West Transport Corridor

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Abstract—This article analyzes the geopolitical and geoeconomic role of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the East-West transport corridor, existing infrastructure projects, transit opportunities and prospects. The steps taken towards becoming an important transit and logistics center of the region, the importance of strategic projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the Baku International Sea Trade Port and the Zangezur corridor are explained. The article also examines the functional role of Azerbaijan within the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian) and its contributions to the development of international trade relations through this corridor. The steps required for Azerbaijan to take a more important position in the Eurasian logistics system in the future are outlined.

Keywords— East-West corridor, Azerbaijan, transport infrastructure, Middle Corridor, transit opportunities, Zangezur corridor, logistics.

In the 21st century, when globalization is intensifying, the role of international transport and logistics systems has significantly increased. The transformations taking place in the world economy and the strengthening of interregional trade relations necessitate the formation of new transport corridors and the optimization of existing routes.

In this context, the East-West transport corridor covering the Eurasian space is considered one of the main communication lines of strategic importance from a geopolitical and geoeconomic point of view. The central role played by Azerbaijan in this corridor significantly increases the importance of the country both intra-regionally and internationally.

The favorable geographical position of the Republic of Azerbaijan - its location at the crossroads connecting East and West, North and South - has created conditions for its transformation into an important transit country on the Eurasian continent. With access to the Caspian Sea and borders with Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Russia, Iran and Turkiye, this state can offer alternative routes both on sea and land routes. The steps taken by Azerbaijan to realize these opportunities have been accompanied by large-scale reforms and investments in the fields of railways, highways, port infrastructure and air transport.

The East-West Transport Corridor is the main part of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, also known as the Middle Corridor, which provides access to European markets from China and other Asian countries. This corridor extends along the China-Kazakhstan-Caspian Sea-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkiye-Europe route and creates a shorter and safer trade connection compared to alternative routes. In this regard, Azerbaijan is one of the main transit countries in the uninterrupted and efficient transportation of transit cargo within the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.

In recent years, Azerbaijan's investments in transport and logistics infrastructure and the projects it has implemented have significantly increased the country's transit potential. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line is of particular importance in this regard. This railway, by forming the shortest railway route connecting Asia and Europe, makes Azerbaijan a major participant in international freight transportation.

At the same time, the Baku International Sea Trade Port and the Alat Free Economic Zone are the main structural components that increase the functionality of this corridor. The Alat port is one of the most modern and largest ports in the Caspian basin with a cargo handling capacity of 15 million tons per year. The free economic zone created here supports the attraction of foreign investments and the development of processing and logistics activities.

Azerbaijan's air transport infrastructure is also an integral part of this system. Heydar Aliyev International Airport located in Baku plays the role of a logistics hub between the Middle East and the CIS countries. In addition, the construction of Zangilan and Fuzuli international airports accelerated the integration of the East Zangilan and Karabakh economic regions into the international trade system.

The Zangilan railway passes almost entirely through the territory of Mehri district. The railway starts from the Sighird mountain of Nuvedi, which borders the Agbend village of Zangilan district, passes through the territory of Nuvedi, Aldera, Mehri and continues to the Sallamelik station in Ordubad district. Its length is 42 km. The railway

passing through the corridor has never belonged to Armenia. Since the time of its construction, the railway has belonged to the Azerbaijani railway network, both during the time of Tsarist Russia, during the USSR, and during the period of independence.

The importance of the Zangilan railway for the USSR was very great. During the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, the Baku-Minjivan-Julfa railway, which passed through the Iranian Julfa region and connected Bandar Abbas and other major ports in Iran, was the main airstrip of the USSR. Arms, ammunition, food, and other cargo from abroad to the besieged USSR were transported through this transport hub.

The Zangezur corridor does not consist of a railway alone. The highway running parallel to the railway is also included in the Zangezur corridor. The highway was a horse-drawn carriage road during the reign of Tsarist Russia. In the early years of Soviet rule, the narrow road was widened and prepared for the movement of cars. After 1991, the railway in the area was completely destroyed by Armenia, and the highway was closed to us.

The prospect of opening the Zangezur corridor is of decisive importance in terms of realizing the full potential of the East-West transport corridor. This corridor will connect the western regions of Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan and Turkiye and will lead to the formation of new economic dynamism in the region. It is expected that transit time and distance will be reduced through the corridor, regional cooperation will be strengthened, and trade volumes will increase. This will also allow Azerbaijan to further strengthen its position in accordance with the "logistics hub" concept.

All these facts show that the Republic of Azerbaijan plays a key role in the formation and development of the East-West transport corridor. Azerbaijan's participation is crucial in ensuring the energy and transport security of the region, regulating international cargo flows, and the effective functioning of logistics chains. The country's transport strategy, steps taken in the field of digitalization, and reforms in the customs system are also among the main factors strengthening this role.

In conclusion, it can be noted that the importance of Azerbaijan in the East-West transport corridor is strategic in both geographical, economic, and political aspects.

The currently existing infrastructure and implemented regional projects allow the country to fully realize its transit capabilities.

In the future, with the activation of the Zangezur corridor, the expansion of the Baku port, and the introduction of digital transport systems, Azerbaijan can become a leading transport and logistics center not only in the region, but also in the Eurasian space as a whole.

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