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THE ZANGEZUR PARADOX: CAN A NEW TRANSIT ROUTE SECURE PEACE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS?

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The Zangezur Paradox: Can a New Transit Route Secure Peace in the South Caucasus?

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Abstract

This article analyzes the conditions under which the Zangezur Corridor can become an effective tool for ensuring sustainable peace in the South Caucasus. As one of the important geo-economic and geo-political intersections connecting Eurasia, the Zangezur Corridor is not only a strategic transport corridor within the Middle Corridor connecting China, Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Europe, but also appears as an opportunity to strengthen regional stability in the post-conflict period between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The article argues that the corridor's peace-building potential can be realized through economic integration, regional interdependence, and confidence-building mechanisms. However, the realization of these opportunities is not automatic. The positive impact of the Zangezur Corridor can be ensured only if there are political normalization between Armenia and Azerbaijan, stable agreements based on the recognition of mutual sovereignty and territorial integrity, clear security guarantees and legal mechanisms. The article also emphasizes the importance of balanced management of the interests of regional and external actors such as Russia, Turkey, Iran and Western countries. According to the results of the study, the Zangezur corridor can become a factor ensuring long-term peace and stability in the South Caucasus only by relying on inclusive governance, transparency and common economic interests.

Key words: *Zangezur corridor, South Caucasus, TRIPP, Middle Corridor, Economic integration, Geopolitical competition, Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, Security dilemma, Sovereignty, Transport logistics*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the increase in regional conflicts and territorial disputes in the Eurasian space has a serious impact on the stability of transcontinental trade routes. Especially in the context of the growing need for alternative transport corridors connecting Europe and Asia, political instability in the transit regions is slowing down the processes of economic integration. From this point of view, the South Caucasus region is of special geopolitical importance as a strategic crossroads connecting Eurasia. The effectiveness of the Middle Corridor project, which connects China with Turkey and Europe through Central Asia and the South Caucasus, depends to a large extent on the continuity of the transport and communication infrastructure in the region. The Zangezur corridor, which is considered one of the important links of this corridor, allows connecting the main territory of Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. However, since an important part of the corridor passes through the territory of Armenia, its opening is closely related to issues of political trust and security in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.

The long-term conflict formed as a result of the Karabakh conflict has been a serious obstacle to the establishment of stable peace in the South Caucasus. This conflict created a complex geopolitical environment involving not only the relations between the two countries, but also the strategic interests of regional powers such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran, as well as external actors such as the United States. Although diplomatic efforts aimed at mitigating the conflict have intensified in recent years, the question of long-term peace and stability in the region remains open. In this context, the opening of the Zangezur corridor is seen not only as an economic and logistical project, but also as a means of strengthening regional trust and ensuring political stability. However, there is no single approach to the question of the real impact of the corridor, because according to some views, it strengthens integration, while others evaluate it as a source of new geopolitical competition.

The research question of this study is: Can the opening of the Zangezur Corridor serve to ensure sustainable peace in the South Caucasus? The main thesis of this article is that the opening of the Zangezur Corridor creates an important opportunity to strengthen peace by strengthening economic integration and regional interdependence, but it can have a positive result only in the conditions of a stable political agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, security guarantees, and balanced management of the interests of foreign powers. This article argues that the Zangezur Corridor has the potential to strengthen sustainable peace in the South Caucasus by strengthening economic integration, regional connectivity and interdependence between Armenia, Azerbaijan and neighboring countries. However, the realization of this potential depends, first of all, on the achievement of political normalization between Armenia and Azerbaijan, on the careful management of regional competition involving Russia, Turkey, and Iran, and on the formation of clear security and governance mechanisms that ensure the balance of interests of local and foreign actors.



MAIN PART

Theoretical framework

The most effective theory for analyzing the Zangezur Corridor and its geopolitical consequences is neorealism, that is, structural realism. Unlike classical realism, it explains the behavior of states in terms of human nature and the internal desire for power, while neorealism sees the anarchic structure of the international system as the main factor that forces states to prioritize their own security and occupy a relatively dominant position in the complex geopolitical system. For this reason, states constantly strive to improve their position in relation to other actors. This theory was put forward by Kenneth Waltz and is an important analytical tool for understanding the interests of both regional and external actors involved in the processes taking place in the South Caucasus. From the point of view of the neorealist approach, the Zangezur corridor is not just an economic project, but a regrouping of regional actors that will significantly change the balance of power in the South Caucasus and create a new balance of power in the region. This article uses the concept of the security dilemma, according to which the strengthening of one state's position is perceived as a threat by another state, which ultimately creates a cycle of conflict. For Azerbaijan and Turkey, this project is considered a national success, including the opening of new economic corridors and the strengthening of their positions in the region.

Significance of Zangezur

The Zangezur Corridor (currently known internationally as “Trump's Pathway for International Peace and Prosperity” - TRIPP) is the central point of the largest geopolitical and geoeconomic changes taking place in the South Caucasus and Eurasia region in the first quarter of the 21st century.[1] The historic agreement signed in Washington on August 8, 2025 confirmed that this project is not just a transport route, but a strategic bridge of global importance.[2] We can see the importance of the corridor in several factors, including from the perspective of geopolitical transformation and new security architecture, the opening of the Zangezur corridor will fundamentally change the traditional balance of power in the region. If previously the security of the region was mainly influenced by the northern (Russia) and southern (Iran) forces, the US-mediated TRIPP project is bringing Western guarantees and investments to the South Caucasus. This is a unique opportunity to turn the “cold peace” between Azerbaijan and Armenia into real cooperation. By connecting the main part of Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan, the corridor will ensure the country's territorial integrity in terms of transport and become a factor strengthening stability in the region. The importance of the Zangezur corridor is evident in the fact that it is the main link of the middle corridor. Economically, the Zangezur Corridor is the most effective and shortest network of the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor) stretching from China to Europe. According to World Bank forecasts, the volume of cargo passing through the Middle Corridor will reach 11 million tons by 2030 due to infrastructure improvements.[3]

[1] Establishing a Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity Working Group, Federal Register, August 15, 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/08/15/2025-15683/establishing-a-trump-route-for-international-peace-and-prosperity-working-group>

[2] U.S. Department of State, Joint Declaration between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia (2025), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2025JointDeclaration.AzerbaijanArmenia.pdf>

[3] World Bank, Middle Trade and Transport Corridor (2023), <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/6248f697aed4be0f770d319dcaa4ca52-0080062023/original/Middle-Trade-and-Transport-Corridor-World-Bank-FINAL.pdf>

In particular, the commissioning of the Zangezur corridor will play a crucial role in distributing this growing cargo flow and preventing congestion on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. Against the backdrop of geopolitical threats to the traditional Northern (via Russia) and Southern (via Iran) routes, the Zangezur Corridor serves as a reliable “lifeline” for trade between East and West.



Figure 1. Zangezur Corridor. Reprinted from SWP Berlin (2022).

Energy security and diversification of resources in the region also depends on the prospects of this corridor. The project is not limited to transport, but also plays an important role in ensuring Europe’s energy security. A new corridor is opening through Nakhchivan for the export of Azerbaijan’s energy resources (oil, gas) and future “green energy”.[4] It is an alternative source that reduces dependence on Russian energy when entering European markets. Also, the laying of power lines and optical fiber communication networks along the corridor will accelerate the transformation of the region into a digital and energy hub. The Zangezur corridor is also important in the integration of the Turkic world. It will provide shortest and connection of Turkey with Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries. This will allow Turkey to expand its transit capacity across Eurasia. According to estimates, the operation of the corridor is expected to bring billions of dollars in revenue to Turkey for 30 years and revive the economy of the eastern regions (Kars, Igdir).[5] Most importantly, this corridor marks the end of regional isolation and economic development in the South Caucasus. For Armenia, this corridor means getting out of the decades-long economic blockade and joining global trade networks. Although there are domestic political concerns, the opening of the corridor will open the doors of access to Central Asian and European markets for Yerevan. For the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, this is the end of the blockade that has been going on since 1989 and the beginning of the regional economic renaissance.[6]

[4] Aze.Media, Azerbaijan–Türkiye partnership supports Nakhchivan’s energy security, <https://aze.media/azerbaijan-turkiye-partnership-supports-nakhchivans-energy-security/>

[5] TRT Haber, Bakan Uraloğlu: Zengezur Koridoru'ndan 1.476 milyar lira kazanç sağlayacağımızı hesaplıyoruz, August 23, 2025, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/bakan-uraloglu-zengezur-koridorundan-1476-milyar-lira-kazanc-saglayacagimizi-hesapliyoruz-917674.html>

[6] Office of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Title of the Article, June 16, 2021, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/52122>

PRINCIPAL ACTORS AND THEIR INTERESTS

Azerbaijan

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor is one of the priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, and Baku views this project not only as a transport route, but also as a guarantee of regional peace and economic integration. Azerbaijan's approach to this issue is based on strict legal frameworks, clear strategic goals and large-scale construction work. Azerbaijan's position on the Zangezur Corridor is based on paragraph 9 of the tripartite statement of November 10, 2020.[7] Official Baku, according to this document, has been insisting on ensuring "free movement" between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and the state leadership have repeatedly stated, the Zangezur Corridor is not a threat to Armenia's sovereignty, but a transit connection that complies with international law.[8] The main demand of Azerbaijan is the introduction of mechanisms that guarantee the safe and free passage of cargo and passengers. The involvement of US and international logistics operators in the process within the framework of the 2025 Washington Agreement (TRIPP) confirms that this demand of Baku is recognized at the international level.[9] As a result of Baku's initiatives, the opening of all communications in the region was put on the agenda. On August 8, 2025, the international status of the corridor was strengthened by the declaration of TRIPP, which was signed with the mediation of the United States.[10] Azerbaijan is not limited to diplomatic negotiations, but is taking the lead in creating the physical infrastructure necessary for the operation of the corridor. The country is rapidly constructing of the Horadiz-Agabend railway with a length of 110.4 km.



Figure 2. Horadiz-Agabend railway. Alliance Multimodal (2025).

[7] Office of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Title of the Article, November 10, 2020, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923>

[8] APA, Ayxan Hacızadə: Dəfələrlə vurğulanmış ki, Zəngəzur dəhlizi Ermənistanın suverenliyinə qarşı yönəlmiş addım deyil, November 7, 2025, <https://apa.az/xarici-siyaset/ayxan-hacizade-defelerle-vurgulamisiq-ki-zengezur-dehlizi-ermenistanin-suverenliyine-qarsi-yonelmis-addim-deyil-925204>

[9] Matin Mammadli, Geopolitical and geoeconomic benefits of opening the Zangezur Corridor (TRIPP), EU Reporter, September 9, 2025, <https://www.eureporter.co/world/south-caucasus/2025/09/09/geopolitical-and-geoeconomic-benefits-of-opening-the-zangezur-corridor-tripp/>

[10] U.S. Department of State, Joint Declaration between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia (2025), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2025JointDeclaration.AzerbaijanArmenia.pdf>



Not only railways, but also highways are being built. The Ahmadbayli-Horadiz-Minivan-Agbend highway, which is about 150 km long, meets technical standards of category 1 (4-6 lanes). 95% of the physical work on this project has been completed, which shows that Azerbaijan is fulfilling its obligations in full and ahead of schedule.[11] Azerbaijan sees the Zangezur corridor not only as a transport, but also as an energy corridor. It is planned to build new pipelines and transmission lines for the export of electricity and gas to Europe through Nakhchivan.[12] The main goal of these constructions for Azerbaijan is to reconnect the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which has been under blockade since 1989, with the main part of the country.[13] As Prime Minister Ali Asadov noted, this corridor will increase the capacity of the Middle Corridor and make Azerbaijan one of the most important logistics centers in Eurasia.[14] Baku (Azerbaijan) Alat international trade port, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the new Zangezur network are integrated into a single system, aiming to play the role of a decisive link in the transportation of goods from Central Asia to Turkey and Europe.

Armenia

Yerevan's position on the issue of the Zangezur Corridor ("Crossroads of Peace" in the Armenian political lexicon, or "TRIPP" according to the new agreement) has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years. The Armenian government has gone through a complex diplomatic path from completely rejecting the project to becoming an active participant on the basis of specific conditions and international guarantees. The most principled demand of Armenia is to abandon the term Zangezur Corridor and the logic behind it of "extraterritoriality" (an area where the country's laws do not apply). Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his administration consider this phrase a threat to Armenia's territorial integrity. Yerevan's firm position is as follows: "There will be no corridor, there will be a transport road". This means that any cargo and passenger passing through the territory of Armenia (including citizens of Azerbaijan) must pass through Armenian border, customs and passport control. Armenia is ready to simplify the process with the help of modern technologies (biometric passports, online declaration), but insists on maintaining full control. In response to pressure from Azerbaijan, Armenia has put forward the "Crossroads of Peace" project, which proposes opening regional roads under its own customs and border control.[15] The Azerbaijani side, however, has viewed this proposal as an attempt to evade the obligations of the 2020 agreement and has emphasized the development of the Iranian route as an alternative.[16] Armenia offered to abandon the control of Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) border guards in the 2020 agreement and provide road safety through a special unit within its National Security Service, which was accepted under TRIPP.[17]

[11] Q. Ashirov, Horadiz-Jabrayil-Zangilan-Aghband road project reaches 95% completion, Azernews.Az, September 16, 2025, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/247483.html>

[12] Aze.Media, Geopolitical and geoeconomic benefits of opening the Zangezur corridor, September 9, 2025, <https://aze.media/geopolitical-and-geoeconomic-benefits-of-opening-the-zangezur-corridor-tripp/>

[13] Office of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Title of the Article, June 16, 2021, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/52122>

[14] AZERTAC, Prime Minister: Due to both their geographical location and modern transport infrastructure, Azerbaijan and Georgia are among the most important participants of Middle Corridor, October 22, 2025, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/prime_minister_due_to_both_their_geographical_location_and_modern_transport_infrastructure_azerbaijan_and_georgia_are_among_the_most_important_participants_of_middle_corridor-3818271

[15] The Government of the Republic of Armenia, "The Crossroads of Peace" project documentation, presented by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, November 2023, https://www.primeminister.am/u_files/file/documents/Xaxaxutyanyan%20xachmeruk-13_11_23.pdf

[16] Aze.Media. (2023, October 25). Hikmet Hajiyev: Zangezur corridor is no longer attractive for Azerbaijan, we prefer the route through Iran. Retrieved from <https://aze.media/hikmet-hajiyev-zangezur-corridor-is-no-longer-attractive-for-azerbaijan-we-prefer-the-route-through-iran/>

[17] Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan interview: The Wall Street Journal [Interview], October 25, 2023, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2023/10/25/Nikol-Pashinyan-Interview-The-Well-Street-Journal/>

In exchange for giving way to Azerbaijan, Armenia demands access to Russia and Central Asia through the territory of Azerbaijan. In terms of infrastructure construction, Armenia lags significantly behind Azerbaijan. If Baku has almost completed the railway and highway in its territory, the construction works on the 43 km distance in the Syunik region of Armenia (Megri section) have been stopped for a long time.[18] The reason for this was Yerevan's political concerns: they were afraid of losing territory if the "corridor" was opened. However, after the 2025 agreements, the situation changed.[19] The Armenian government has started preparatory work in areas such as Nrnadzor. Armenia has proposed to operate its own trains and operators to transport goods between the western regions of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. Through this initiative, official Yerevan aims to fully maintain state jurisdiction over transit routes and prevent the corridor from acquiring an "extraterritorial" status. Armenia's role in the Zangezur Corridor marks a sharp turn in its foreign policy. Yerevan now minimizes Russia's participation in this project, preferring to cooperate with the USA and the European Union. As stated in Pashinyan's speech at the UN, Armenia aims to get out of the economic blockade and become a full member of global trade networks (Middle Corridor) through this route.[20]

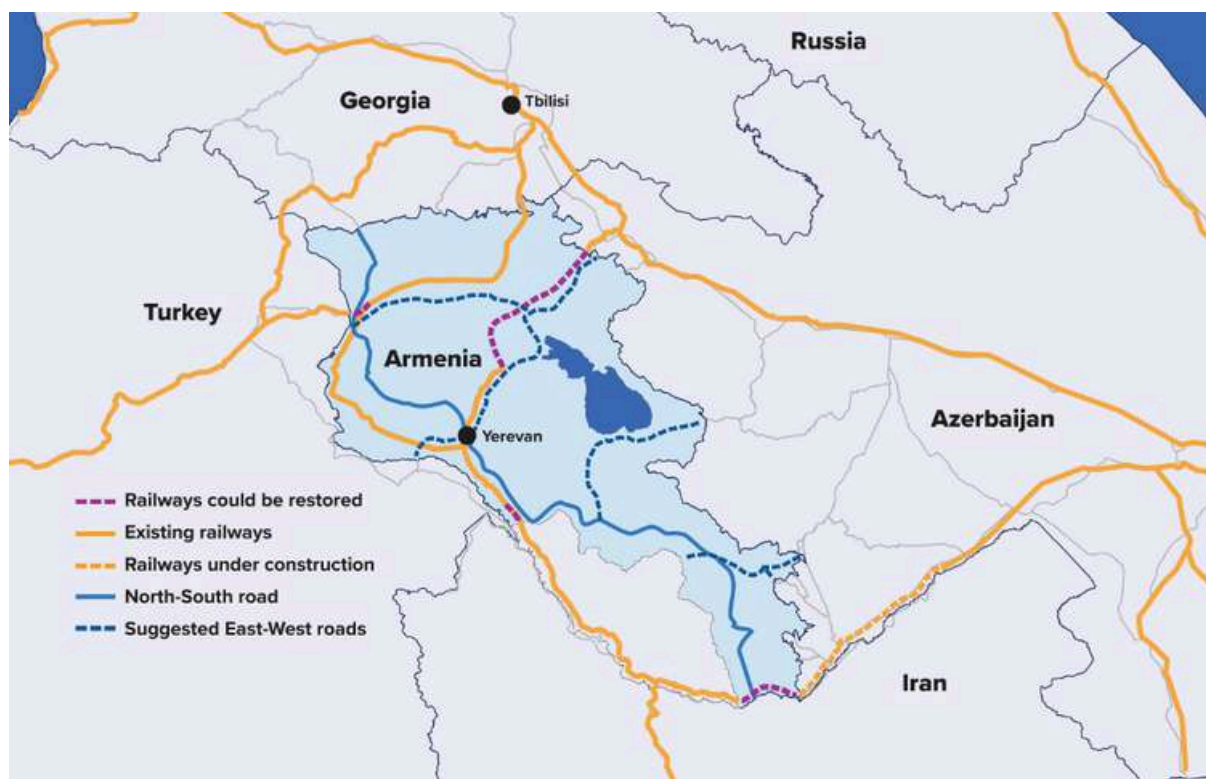


Figure 3. Map of the transport corridors passing through Armenian territory. Atlantic Council (2024).

Georgia

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor (TRIPP) has two meanings for Georgia. On the one hand, official Tbilisi supports regional peace, on the other hand, there are serious concerns in society and political circles about the risk of losing the country's transit monopoly.

[18] Nargiz Mammadli, Armenia says construction of 'Tripp Corridor' to begin in late 2026, Caspian News, November 14, 2025, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/armenia-says-construction-of-tripp-corridor-to-begin-in-late-2026-2025-11-13-0/>

[19] U.S. Department of State. (2025). Joint declaration between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2025JointDeclarationAzerbaijanArmenia.pdf>

[20] Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan UN speech [Speech], September 26, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2024/09/26/Nikol-Pashinyan-UN-Speech/>

According to Azerbaijani media reports, Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili positively assessed the prospects of new regional transport routes emerging from a potential peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia (APA News Agency, 2023). [21] Within Georgia, the Zangezur Corridor is viewed as a competitor. [22] The main fear is that if a direct land link is established between Azerbaijan and Turkey through Armenia, Georgia may lose its strategic transit importance, its monopoly on the Middle Corridor and financial revenues from transit. [23] In fact, the Zangezur Corridor does not replace the Georgian Corridor, but complements it. [24] The volume of cargo on the Middle Corridor is expected to increase by 3 times (up to 11 million tons) by 2030. [25] Georgia's infrastructure alone may not be able to handle this volume, so having a parallel route will increase the attractiveness of the entire corridor. Given the geopolitical complexities and sanctions restrictions affecting the North (Russia) and South (Iran) routes, the South Caucasus is emerging as an important and reliable alternative transit hub. In this process, the cooperation of the Georgian and Zangezur corridors will strengthen the potential of the region. Whether or not the Zangezur Corridor is operational does not diminish the importance of Georgia as a transit country.

Iran

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor (TRIPP) is a geopolitical call for Iran's interests in the South Caucasus. Official Tehran considers this project not just a transport route, but a threat to its national security and regional influence [26]. Iran's position is built on the Red Line rhetoric. Iran's biggest fear is the disconnection of its historical border with Armenia. Tehran views the Zangezur Corridor as a direct link between Azerbaijan and Turkey, creating a "Turkish belt" along Iran's northern border. Iranian officials and analysts often refer to the Zangezur Corridor as the Turan Corridor or the NATO Corridor. [27] The 2025 Washington Agreement (TRIPP) and the influx of US and Western investment into the project have confirmed Tehran's concerns. If the corridor has an extraterritorial status or Armenia's sovereignty is limited, Iran may lose Armenia, an important gateway to Eurasia and the Black Sea. This risks a complete blockade of Iran from the north and drastically reduces its role in regional logistics.

The construction of this corridor creates internal and external risks for Iran. The external danger is that the increasing influence of Turkey and Azerbaijan will ensure that Central Asian resources will bypass Iran and flow directly to the West. The internal danger is the strengthening of the ideas of "Turkish unity" and the growth of separatism (separatism) among ethnic Azerbaijanis, who make up a significant part of Iran's population (about 24%). [28] There are also economic losses.

[21] "Speaker of the Georgian Parliament: Zangezur Corridor Will Be Beneficial for the Region," APA, November 23, 2025, <https://en.apa.az/foreign-policy/speaker-of-the-georgian-parliament-zangezur-corridor-will-be-beneficial-for-the-region-484400>

[22] JAMnews. (2024, October 10). Regional transportation routes: How Georgia's transit role is changing in light of new realities. Retrieved from <https://jam-news.net/regional-transportation-routes-how-georgias-transit-role-is-changing/>

[23] Tural Heybatov, Why Georgia sees Zangezur Corridor as threat, Caspian Post, December 3, 2025, <https://caspianpost.com/analytics/why-georgia-sees-zangezur-corridor-as-threat>

[24] Caspian Post, Why Georgia sees Zangezur corridor as threat?, December 3, 2025, <https://caspianpost.com/analytics/why-georgia-sees-zangezur-corridor-as-threat>

[25] World Bank, Middle Trade and Transport Corridor (2023), <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/6248f697aed4be0f770d319dcaa4ca52-0080062023/original/Middle-Trade-and-Transport-Corridor-World-Bank-FINAL.pdf>

[26] Islamic Republic News Agency. Establishment of Zangezur corridor a red line for Iran: MP. September 7, 2024. <https://en.irna.ir/news/85589553/Establishment-of-Zangezur-corridor-a-red-line-for-Iran-MP>

[27] Amin Huseyn, Iran's resistance to the Zangezur Corridor reflects its broader opposition to peace in the South Caucasus, Modern Diplomacy, September 17, 2024, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/09/17/irans-resistance-to-the-zangezur-corridor-reflects-its-broader-opposition-to-peace-in-the-south-caucasus/>

[28] Iranome, Ethnic groups, https://iranome.com/ethnic_groups

If the Zangezur Corridor becomes operational, Iran will lose its traditional transit advantage. Currently, cargo transportation of Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan and Turkey to Central Asia is carried out mainly through the territory of Iran. With the opening of the new corridor, Iran will lose these transit revenues. The export of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan's energy resources to Europe through the Caspian through Azerbaijan and the Zangezur Corridor undermines Iran's ambitions to become an energy hub. In order to mitigate the situation, Iran is using the "strategy of not losing", Iran has chosen the way of diplomatic pressure. Officially, Tehran has opened a consulate in the Syunik region of Armenia (in the city of Kapan) and announced that it will respond militarily to any border changes.[29] Iran offered Azerbaijan the Aras Corridor passing through its territory as an alternative to Zangezur and accelerated the construction work on it.[30] For Tehran, transit through its territory is the only way to maintain

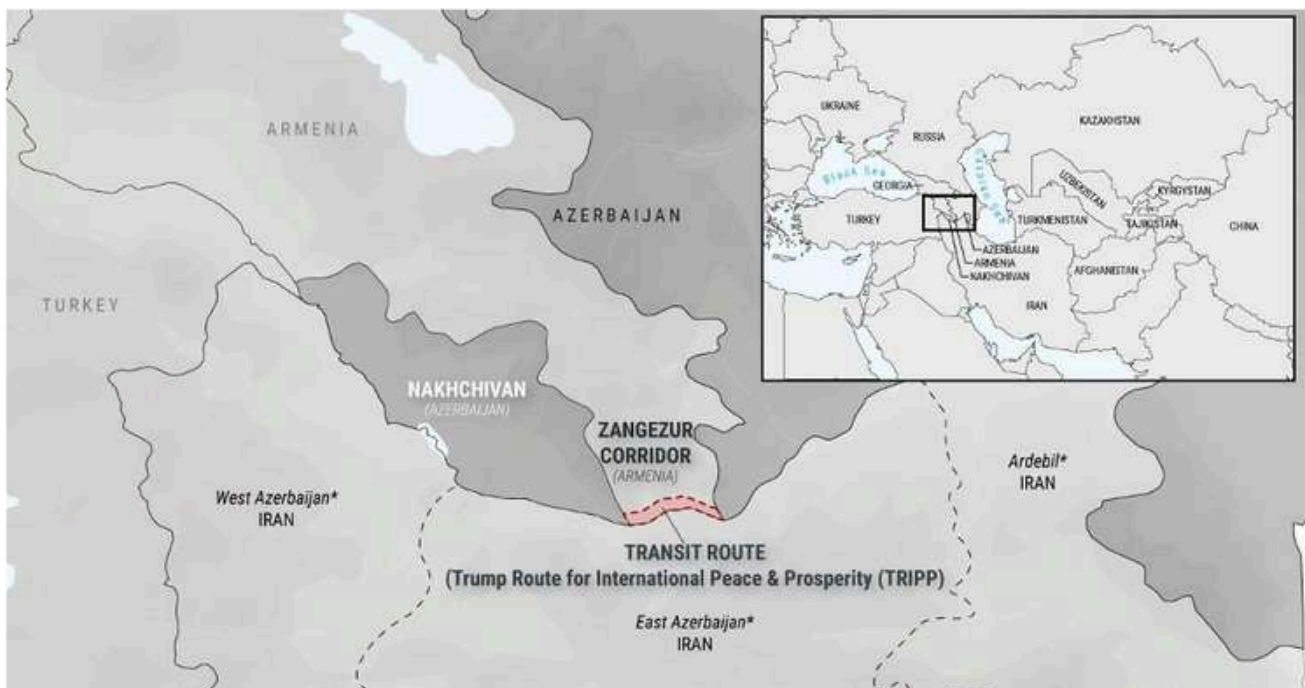


Figure 4. View of the Zangezur Corridor from the Iran border. Caspian News (2025).

However, the 2025 Washington Declaration and Russia's neutral or even sympathetic stance on the Zangezur Corridor (due to its own interests in circumventing sanctions) have put Iran in a difficult position. As a result of Moscow's demand for "clarification" and the active involvement of the United States in the region, Iran remains almost isolated in the Zangezur issue.

United States of America

2025 was a turning point in US policy in the South Caucasus. While Washington has long been an observer, it has become the main architect and guarantor of the Zangezur Corridor project under the administration of President Donald Trump. The US approach to this project is not just a matter of transportation, but is formed as an important element of global geopolitics.

[29] Al Jazeera, "Iran Opens Consulate in Armenia's Kapan to Deliver a Message," October 22, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/22/iran-opens-consulate-in-armenias-kapan-to-deliver-a-message>

[30] Yeghia Tashjian, "Do Russia and Iran's Interests Collide over the Zangezur Corridor?," The Cradle, September 13, 2024, <https://thecradle.co/articles/do-russia-and-irans-interests-collide-over-the-zangezur-corridor>



The US position was clearly expressed in the Washington Declaration signed on August 8, 2025. The naming of the corridor “Trump’s Pathway for International Peace and Prosperity” (TRIPP) shows how seriously Washington is paying attention to this project. The reason why the United States attaches so much importance to this project is clear, which is to permanently strengthen the peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan and to integrate the region into the Western economic system. It is also to turn the concept of Zangezur Corridor into an economic project acceptable to all parties while guaranteeing Armenia’s sovereignty. For the US, the Zangezur Corridor is the most effective means of pushing Russia and Iran out of the South Caucasus. As a result of Washington’s mediation, the role of Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) border guards in ensuring the security of the corridor was eliminated (or minimized). This will destroy Moscow’s role as a traditional “security provider” in the region. The opening of the corridor will remove Iran from the regional transit games and allow the West to have access to the resources of Central Asia (bypassing Iran and Russia).[31] The US is participating in the project not only as a political sponsor, but also as a practical executor. As part of TRIPP, US and Western companies are expected to participate in the construction of infrastructure (railways, roads, energy networks). This ensures the entry of Western capital into Armenia. To address Armenia’s “extraterritoriality” concerns, the US proposed the “International Neutral Logistics Operator” model.[32] According to it, cargo control will be carried out by an international consortium led by the US or a neutral company using digital technologies, not by Russia or the military of the parties. This guarantees safe passage for Baku and sovereignty for Yerevan.[33] Washington considers the Zangezur Corridor to be a crucial link of the Middle Corridor connecting China and Central Asia with Europe.[34] This route is a strategic safe route for the West as it bypasses the territory of Russia (Northern Corridor) and Iran (Southern Corridor). Also, this corridor plays an important role in the delivery of Caspian energy to Europe.

Russia

In 2025, the situation around the Zangezur Corridor (TRIPP) has become the most complex geopolitical puzzle in the South Caucasus for the Russian Federation. While Moscow’s position may appear outwardly to be that of a “neutral observer”, in reality the Kremlin is trying to strike a balance between serious strategic concerns and imperative pragmatism. Russia’s official rhetoric is cautious. Press Secretary of the President of Russia Dmitry Peskov noted that Moscow considers the Zangezur Corridor “a sovereign affair of Armenia and Azerbaijan” and calls for the signing of a peace treaty as soon as possible.[35] However, behind the scenes, the situation is different. The statement of the representative of the Federation Council, Vladimir Jabarov, that “the problems of the region cannot be solved without Russia” and his doubts about “Trump’s direction” indicate Moscow’s strong dissatisfaction with being excluded from the process.[36]

[31] Yeghia Tashjian, “Do Russia and Iran’s Interests Collide over the Zangezur Corridor?,” *The Cradle*, September 13, 2024, <https://thecradle.co/articles/do-russia-and-irans-interests-collide-over-the-zangezur-corridor>

[32] Matin Mammadli, “Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Benefits of Opening the Zangezur Corridor (TRIPP),” *EU Reporter*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.eureporter.co/world/south-caucasus/2025/09/09/geopolitical-and-geoeconomic-benefits-of-opening-the-zangezur-corridor-tripp/>

[33] Matin Mammadli, “Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Benefits of Opening the Zangezur Corridor (TRIPP),” *EU Reporter*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.eureporter.co/world/south-caucasus/2025/09/09/geopolitical-and-geoeconomic-benefits-of-opening-the-zangezur-corridor-tripp/>

[34] Just Security, “U.S. Counters China, Russia in the South Caucasus, Central Asia,” November 24, 2025, <https://www.justsecurity.org/125271/us-counter-china-russia-south-caucasus-central-asia/>

[35] Azernews, “Peskov: Zangezur Corridor Issue Concerns Only Baku and Yerevan,” July 17, 2024, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/245123.html>

[36] *The Guardian*, “Azerbaijan and Armenia Sign Peace Deal at White House That Creates a Trump Route in Region,” August 9, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/aug/09/azerbaijan-and-armenia-sign-peace-deal-at-white-house-that-creates-a-trump-route-in-region>



For Russia, the direct entry of the USA into the region as a “manager” (through Armenia’s lease of the corridor to the USA) is the crossing of a “red line”. According to the 2020 agreement, the security of the corridor was to be ensured by Russian border guards.[37] But the events of 2025 and the TRIPP project eliminated this clause. Russia lost physical control over the road, which undermined its status as a “security guarantor” in the region. The acquisition of infrastructure management in Zangezur by the US and Western companies means the entry of NATO standards into the South Caucasus, which is considered to be Russia’s immediate border region.[38] Nevertheless, Moscow is not completely blocking the project, as certain economic benefits are also expected from it. Any new transport corridor for Russia under Western sanctions is the outside world. If the Zangezur Corridor becomes operational and is open to Russian cargo, it could be an additional route for Moscow to Turkey and the Middle East. Moscow has several concerns about the corridor. One of them is the increasing integration of the Turkic world. The Zangezur Corridor will dramatically increase Turkey’s influence in the region. Ankara’s direct connection with Baku and Central Asia threatens Russia’s hegemony in the post-Soviet region. Some problems may arise in relations with Iran. In particular, Russia has to take into account Iran’s opposition to Zangezur. If Moscow supports the project, the strategic partnership with Tehran may break. Therefore, Russia has to play a “balanced game” between Iran and Azerbaijan/Turkey. Also, the Georgian factor is not absent. Russia can influence the roads passing through Georgia. However, if Zangezur is opened, regional cargo flows may shift to a direction outside Russia’s sphere of influence.

Turkey

For the Republic of Turkey, the Zangezur Corridor (TRIPP) is not just a transport route, but one of the most important geostrategic projects of the 21st century. Official Ankara sees this corridor as an opportunity to establish a direct land connection with the Turkic world and redraw the logistics map of Eurasia. As Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan noted, Ankara considers the Zangezur Corridor to be the key to regional peace and economic cooperation.[39] According to Erdogan, the project will benefit not only Azerbaijan and Turkey, but also Armenia, Iran and Georgia.[40] Ankara insists that this corridor should be “not a source of discord, but a symbol of reconciliation”. Turkey fully supports the Washington Declaration of August 8, 2025. The US-mediated agreement is a good opportunity for Ankara to reduce the blocking influence of Russia and Iran in the region and implement the project under international guarantees. The greatest importance of the Zangezur Corridor for Turkey is the establishment of a continuous land connection with Azerbaijan and the Turkic countries of Central Asia.[41] Currently, Turkey depends on Georgia or Iran for access to Azerbaijan and Central Asia. The Zangezur Corridor will reduce this dependence on Turkey and allow an alternative access to Baku via Nakhchivan and from there to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan via the Caspian Sea. The idea of the Turkish Belt or Turonian Corridor, which Iran and some geopolitical rivals view with concern, is a strategic integration tool for Ankara.

[37] President of Russia, “Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation,” November 10, 2020, Kremlin.ru, <https://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>

[38] Armenian Center for American Studies, “Iranian-Russian Tensions Over the Zangezur Corridor,” September 10, 2024, <https://americanstudies.am/iranian-russian-tensions-over-the-zangezur-corridor/>

[39] “Erdoğan Hails Breakthrough on Zangezur Corridor as a Strategic Game-Changer for the Region,” PA Turkey, 2025, <https://www.paturkey.com/news/2025/erdogan-hails-breakthrough-on-zangezur-corridor-a-strategic-gamechanger-for-the-region-22038>

[40] “Erdoğan Says He Hopes for Armenia-Azerbaijan Consensus on Transport Links,” Armenpress, July 21, 2025, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1225336.html>

[41] AzerNews, “Erdoğan: Zangezur Corridor Connects Not Only Nakhchivan, but Also the Turkic World,” May 29, 2025, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/242533.html>



As Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yilmaz noted, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor will make the Middle Corridor more attractive.[42] For cargo from China to Europe, this route shortens the distance and time. Through this, Turkey aims to become the main transit hub in East-West trade. Turkey is actively promoting projects to export Turkmenistan's gas to Europe through Azerbaijan and the Zangezur Corridor. This will dramatically increase Ankara's role in European energy security. Turkey is not pursuing a "wait and watch" policy, but an active construction policy. While Azerbaijan is completing work on its territory, Turkey is also working intensively on its side. In August 2025, Turkey started the construction of the Kars-Igdir-Aralik-Dilucu railway. This two-track electrified line with a length of 224 km is planned to be completed in four years. This line connects directly to the border of Nakhchivan (Sadarak).[43] Turkish companies express their readiness to participate in infrastructure projects not only in their territory, but also in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan and in the future (if the peace agreement is fully implemented) in the territory of Armenia. Turkey is the closest strategic partner of Azerbaijan in the Zangezur corridor project and one of the main beneficiaries of the project. Ankara aims not only to gain economic benefits through this corridor, but also to unite the Turkic world and occupy a central place in the geopolitical architecture of Eurasia. For Turkey, Zangezur is the fulfillment of a century-old dream.

CAN THE ZANGEZUR CORRIDOR SERVE AS A GUARANTEE OF PEACE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS?

As an important branch of the Middle Corridor, the Zangezur Corridor is one of the strategic infrastructure projects expected to be integrated into the global transport and logistics system. This corridor will strengthen land transport links between Asia and Europe and will allow to significantly increase the volume of goods and services passing through the region. In particular, the launch of the Zangezur Corridor within the framework of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route will reduce freight transportation time, reduce logistics costs, and serve as an alternative to existing traditional corridors. As a result, cargo flows through the Middle Corridor are predicted to increase several times in the near future. This process creates new opportunities for Armenia, which remains in the conditions of economic isolation. Through the Zangezur Corridor, Armenia can integrate into regional and international trade networks and benefit from transit services, infrastructure development and investment flows. This has a positive effect on the country's economic stability and serves as an important basis for long-term development. At the same time, the Zangezur Corridor will become an important component of the trade route diversification policy for Azerbaijan. Currently, the country is facing some logistical and geopolitical restrictions in exporting its energy resources to world markets, especially to European countries. The new corridor will alleviate these problems and reduce dependence on one or more countries for foreign trade routes. This will serve to strengthen Azerbaijan's energy security and export stability. In addition, it is planned to expand cooperation in the field of energy between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, gradually transition from traditional energy sources to green energy, and use the Zangezur Corridor to deliver it to European markets.[44]

[42] "Opening of Zangazur Corridor Will Make Middle Corridor More Desirable – Turkish Vice President," APA, February 25, 2025, <https://en.apa.az/foreign-policy/opening-of-zangazur-corridor-will-make-middle-corridor-more-desirable-turkish-vice-president-461441.html>

[43] "Groundbreaking Ceremony for Kars-Igdir-Aralik-Dilucu Railway Line Will Take Place on August 22," APA, accessed Decem

[44] President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Leaders of Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan Launch a Project for Developing and Transferring 'Green' Energy," November 13, 2024, <https://president.uz/en/lists/view/7699ber> 22, 2025, <https://en.apa.az/foreign-policy/groundbreaking-ceremony-for-kars-igdir-aralik-dilucu-railway-line-will-take-place-on-august-22-475547.html>



However, from a practical and geopolitical point of view, this corridor is distinguished by the possibility of creating new dangers and risks, rather than serving the establishment of stable peace in the region. In particular, the issues of construction and use of the corridor are closely related to Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, regional power competition, and security architecture. First of all, the Zangezur Corridor sharpens the issue of state sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia. The Armenian side opposes the operation of the corridor in an extraterritorial status, evaluating it as a loss of control over its sovereign territory. This scenario may cause political instability of the country, mobilization of the forces of nationalism and pressure on the government. As a result, the corridor risks becoming a factor that increases internal and external political conflicts, rather than a peace-building mechanism.

The second important risk is related to the possibility of remilitarization of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Zangezur issue. This is one of the most controversial in the peace negotiations that took place after the Second war in Karabakh in 2020 and was extremely hard to reach an agreement. When the political or military pressure is used instead of agreement and mutual consent to implement the corridor, the risk of border conflicts and escalation will increase dramatically. In such circumstances, Zangezur may not be an infrastructure for peace, but a catalyst for new conflicts.

There is also the Zangezur Corridor which is becoming a geopolitical center that puts more pressure on regional and global super powers. As Russia tries to preserve the control of the region that has been traditionally linked to it and enhance the control over the transport routes, Turkey views the region as an opportunity to build stronger strategic relations between the Turks nations. Iran considers the Zangezur corridor a threat to its national security and is deeply concerned with the severity of the disturbance of the current land ties with Armenia. As a result, if the corridor becomes a tool for changing the balance of power rather than a regional consensus, geopolitical competition and instability will increase rather than stability in the South Caucasus.

In addition, the essence of the Zangezur corridor as an economic project has fallen into the background, and its acquisition of a military-strategic and political character is also an important risk factor. If the corridor is used as an instrument of military logistics or political pressure rather than trade, transit and regional development, it will undermine mutual trust in the region and increase the security dilemma. In such conditions, the parties are forced to take additional measures to ensure their security, which may lead to an arms race.

Finally, neglecting the interests of the local population and social factors during the construction of the corridor poses a serious threat to long-term peace. Unless local level discontent, ethnic sensitivities and socio-economic issues are addressed, the Zangezur region is likely to become a source of permanent instability rather than an infrastructure of peace. Overall, the Zangezur Corridor could theoretically serve peace by strengthening regional integration and economic interdependence. However, in practical terms, if it is formed as a threat to sovereignty, geopolitical competition and a tool of military pressure, it is more likely to become a factor that creates new security crises than to ensure stable peace in the South Caucasus.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the geopolitical and geoeconomic significance of the Zangezur Corridor in the South Caucasus region, this study has shown that the project's role in building sustainable peace is twofold. In response to the main question posed in the article, it should be noted that the Zangezur Corridor is not a guarantee of peace by itself, but a strategic tool that has the potential to ensure it or, on the contrary, to intensify the conflict. Its contribution to regional stability directly depends on the following decisive conditions.

First, economic interdependence prevails over the security dilemma. The neorealist approach shows that mistrust between states is the main obstacle to cooperation. The Zangezur Corridor will become a factor of peace only when it is accepted as a trade corridor based on the principle of “win-win” and not “win-lose”. A trade relationship between Azerbaijan and Armenia that increases the cost of war and maximizes the benefits of peace is the foundation of long-term stability.

Second, legal certainty on the issue of sovereignty and territorial integrity. As the analysis shows, the most sensitive point of the project is the interpretation of the term “corridor” and control mechanisms. For Armenia, this corridor should not pose a risk of loss of sovereignty, and for Azerbaijan it should guarantee a reliable connection with Nakhchivan. Agreement on customs and border control mechanisms compatible with international law is a key condition for turning conflict into cooperation.

Third, the balance of interests of external actors. Russia, Turkey, Iran and Western countries have different interests in the region. The Zangezur Corridor should not become an arena of geopolitical competition. On the contrary, this project should acquire an inclusive character as an integral part of the Middle Corridor connecting East and West, and serve the integration of all parties.

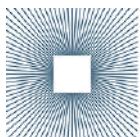
Fourth, domestic political will and public trust. The most acceptable way is the “Corporate integration” scenario, which requires not only an agreement between elites, but also a decrease in the rhetoric of mutual hatred in societies and a pragmatic approach.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Zangezur corridor is not only a bridge connecting Turkey and Azerbaijan, but has the potential to become a “blood vessel” in the global trade system of the South Caucasus. However, in order for this opportunity to become a reality, the parties must abandon historical enmity and form a new regional architecture based on mutual recognition and common economic interests. Otherwise, the corridor risks becoming a source of instability rather than a regional opportunity.



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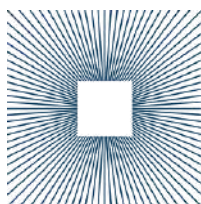
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