

The Zangezur Corridor in The Architecture of Transport and Logistics Integration of The Organization of Turkic States

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Abstract

This study analyzes the significance of the Zangezur Corridor within the developing transport and logistics framework of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and evaluates its potential impact on the development of the Middle Corridor. Drawing on OTS strategic and regulatory documents and relevant analytical literature, it argues that transport infrastructure serves as a system-forming (structural) element of Turkic integration rather than a supplementary sector. The Zangezur Corridor can be conceptualized as the missing land link in the Türkiye–Azerbaijan–Caspian–Central Asia axis, capable of reducing logistics costs, strengthening the resilience of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, and expanding layered connectivity through energy and digital infrastructures. Uzbekistan is emerging as a key actor in shaping transport integration within the Turkic space. This can be seen in its institutional initiatives within the OTS, its efforts to promote multimodal interoperability, and its contribution to developing digital transit tools and East–West connectivity. At the same time, the implementation of the corridor is influenced by political constraints, competition from alternative routes, and the differing interests of external actors. The study also suggests that transport could become a key area of project-based cooperation through OTS+. Overall, the Zangezur Corridor can be understood both as a potential strategic connectivity resource and as an indicator of the institutional maturity of the OTS.

Keywords: Organization of Turkic States; Zangezur Corridor; Middle Corridor; Trans-Caspian International Transport Route; Transport Integration; Digital Logistics; Eurasian Geoeconomics.

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1. Introduction

Transport and logistics connectivity in modern Eurasia has become a crucial factor influencing not only the dynamics of foreign trade but also the extent of states' integration into global value chains, the sustainability of economic growth, and the degree of geo-economic autonomy. Due to the fragmentation of traditional trade

routes, increased sanctions pressure, rising political risks and changes in global logistics, transport corridors are no longer just extra infrastructure; they are now strategic development resources. For Eurasian countries, especially those that do not have direct access to sea routes, connectivity has become a must for participation in international trade, finding new export markets, and

strengthening economic sovereignty.

From this perspective, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has been building its own infrastructure and logistics system. In this system, transportation is not seen as a separate area of cooperation, but as a key part of Turkic integration. The Turkic World Vision–2040, the Strategy for 2022–2026, and the Gabala Declaration (2025) all show this policy direction. These documents put a lot of importance on fast and long-lasting multimodal connectivity. They also make the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) a reliable East–West transport link and stress the need for digitalizing transit procedures (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022, 2025; Omuraliev, 2025). In combination, they show that the OTS has gradually changed from a mostly political and cultural way of working together to an infrastructure and economic model in which transport routes, digital platforms and energy networks are the main parts of integration.

The Turkic region's economy is also getting bigger, which shows how important this agenda is becoming. The total GDP of OTS member states were about USD 1.11 trillion in the first half of 2025. The total trade turnover was about USD 701.6 billion, which was about 4.2 percent of all trade in the world. During the same time, the OTS economies saw an average GDP growth rate of about 5.4 percent, which was much higher than the global average of 2.3 percent. These figures highlight the growing economic and strategic importance of the OTS as a regional link connecting Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Türkiye within the wider Eurasian system (Center for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025).

The Middle Corridor forms the core of this emerging architecture. It includes the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars (BTK) railway, and the port infrastructure of the Caspian basin. Together, they create a multimodal transport system linking China, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the European Union, offering an alternative to northern routes passing through the Russian Federation. Its importance has increased in recent years, particularly after 2020–2022, when geopolitical instability, the war in Ukraine and sanctions regimes reduced the reliability of traditional Eurasian logistics chains (Jamestown Foundation, 2023; Valansi, 2025). Under these conditions, the Middle Corridor has transformed into not merely a transport route but also a geo-economic tool for diversifying the external economic relations of Central

Asian and South Caucasian states.

Before 2022, the Northern Corridor accounted for more than 86 percent of China–Europe transport flows. The Middle Corridor on the other hand, only handled less than 1 percent. This imbalance shows how northern routes have been more important in the past and how the Trans-Caspian route didn't have enough capacity to handle more traffic before the war in Ukraine caused recent geopolitical problems (Valansi, 2025). At the same time, freight traffic on the TITR has grown a lot in the past few years, going from about 0.8 million tons to 4.5 million tons per year. By 2025, container traffic had reached about 77,000 TEU, and experts expect it to continue growing (Kwan, 2026).

The Middle Corridor is no longer just a transport route; it has become a place where regional and external actors compete for power, trade routes and less politically sensitive transit directions. In this context, corridor development reflects not only logistical processes, but also broader dynamics of the international political economy (Valansi, 2025).

For countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, the corridor is an important tool for diversifying their foreign trade and making them less reliant on traditional trade routes. It is an important way for landlocked economies to get to European and global markets (Valansi, 2025).

The Middle Corridor is still not fully built because there is no direct land link between mainland Azerbaijan, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and Türkiye. This “infrastructure gap,” which came about after the Soviet Union fell apart and the Armenian Azerbaijani conflict in the 1990s, stops the creation of a continuous Türkiye–Azerbaijan–Caspian–Central Asia axis. This axis is the spatial core of Turkic transport integration (Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst, 2023). So, restoring this connectivity through the Zangezur Corridor is very important for finishing the logical configuration of the Middle Corridor and for making a stable Eurasian multimodal axis.

The Zangezur Corridor would connect Eastern Zangezur to Nakhchivan and then to Türkiye. It is not just a regional infrastructure project, but also a potential geo-economic mechanism at the macro-regional level. This could reduce Central Asian states' dependence on transit through Russia and Iran (Valansi, 2025; Jamestown Foundation, 2023). The corridor can help make East–West connectivity in Eurasia more spatially coherent by making it easier for Central Asia, the South Caucasus,

and Türkiye to connect logistically and join larger trade and transport networks.

The Zangezur Corridor is important because it is built into the OTS architecture. The Zangezur project is different from many other routes that are mostly promoted in bilateral formats. It is written down in multilateral OTS strategic documents, such as the Turkic World Vision–2040 and the Gabala Declaration (2025). This gives it the character of a collective infrastructure initiative aimed at creating a unified Turkic connectivity space, rather than just a national transport solution (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2025).

An additional dimension of the Zangezur Corridor is associated with its energy and digital potential. The project could accommodate not only roads and railways, but also power transmission lines and fiber-optic communication networks. This could create a multi-infrastructure platform.

Alongside the digitalization initiatives of the Middle Corridor (eTIR, e-Permit, Digital Trade Corridor) and broader efforts to expand digital connectivity among Turkic states, the Zangezur Corridor can be seen as an important element of a future Turkic digital and energy space (Organization of Turkic States, 2022, 2024; Mirziyoyev, 2024; Omuraliev, 2025). This article examines the Zangezur Corridor within the emerging transport and logistics architecture of the OTS and considers its role in developing the Middle Corridor as a more sustainable, multimodal and digitalized Eurasian route.

2. Historical and Institutional Evolution of Transport Connectivity in The South Caucasus In the Context of Turkic Integration

The historical evolution of transport connectivity in the South Caucasus constitutes a structural foundation for understanding the contemporary geo-economic significance of the Zangezur Corridor. During the Soviet period, the region functioned as an integrated transport space in which railway and road networks ensured relatively continuous connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Armenia and the Turkish direction through interconnected junctions. The collapse of this inherited connectivity after the Soviet period, together with the securitization of cross-border transport routes following ethno-political conflicts, produced a persistent infrastructural discontinuity across the region. This

reflects a broader pattern of political fragmentation and great-power competition that have long limited the development of stable and institutionalized connectivity in the South Caucasus (Cornell, 2001; de Waal, 2021; Blank, 2022).

After the collapse of the USSR and the conflicts of the early 1990s, transport connectivity in the South Caucasus was disrupted, creating a long-standing infrastructural gap and fragmentation of the Caspian–South Caucasus land bridge (de Waal, 2021; Blank, 2022; Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst, 2023). This situation increased dependence on alternative transit routes and made the governance of transport corridors more strategically sensitive (Koolae & Rashidi, 2024).

From the early 2000s, Turkic states began to develop institutional mechanisms for coordinating transport policies and regulating transnational flows. Within the Turkic Council framework, governance instruments were introduced that laid the foundations of a coordinated transport agenda. These include a Transport Coordination Council, specialized working groups, and an operational Communication Line, which together marked a shift from predominantly bilateral arrangements to a multilateral model of transit governance (Turkic Council, 2014; Organization of Turkic States, 2022; Omuraliev, 2025).

The adoption of the Rules of Procedure in the Field of Transport formalized these processes by introducing coordination mechanisms, emergency response procedures, harmonized documentation, and permanent expert platforms. This framework made it possible to expand digital transit solutions such as eTIR and electronic permits, support the modernization of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), and improve the alignment of transit procedures among participating states. Together, these helped integrate the Zangezur Corridor into the strategic architecture of the OTS (Organization of Turkic States, 2024).

After the Second Karabakh War in 2020, new opportunities emerged to reconsider transport infrastructure in the South Caucasus as part of a broader Eurasian system of corridors and supply chains. In this context, the Zangezur Corridor is seen as the missing land link that can complete the Türkiye–Azerbaijan–Caspian–Central Asia axis and strengthen the Middle Corridor as a more resilient multimodal configuration (Organization of Turkic States, 2021; 2022; Jamestown Foundation, 2023).

In spatial terms, the corridor is relatively simple: a segment of about 40–43 km across the Syunik region would connect Horadiz with Nakhchivan and link to Turkish transport hubs such as Iğdır and Kars, connecting to European railway networks. The relevance of such a connection has increased alongside capacity upgrades on the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway and the expansion of operational ambitions for the Middle Corridor, which together strengthen the need for a continuous land arc between Türkiye and the Caspian basin (Aliyev, 2024; Tokayev, 2024; Organization of Turkic States, 2024).

This logic was consolidated in the Turkic World Vision–2040, the OTS Strategy 2022–2026 and the Gabala Declaration (2025), where the Zangezur Corridor was institutionally embedded into the Middle Corridor as a priority direction of transport integration (Organization of Turkic States, 2021; 2022; 2025). Consequently, the corridor acquired the status of a long-term multilateral infrastructure instrument rather than a purely post-conflict initiative.

At the conceptual level, the macro-regional significance of the corridor resonates with classical geopolitical interpretations of the Caspian–South Caucasus nexus. Zbigniew Brzezinski described Azerbaijan as a strategic “gateway” controlling access to Caspian resources and the broader Central Asian space. In this view, the prolonged closure of the Zangezur link reinforced continental isolation, while its restoration could enhance direct access from Central Asia to Türkiye and European markets (Brzezinski, 1997).

This historical trajectory shows that the Zangezur Corridor should be seen not as an isolated post-conflict initiative, but as a mechanism for restoring disrupted connectivity and consolidating an emerging Turkic transport architecture. It also serves as a tool for reshaping Eurasian transport geography and strengthening the institutional capacity of the Organization of Turkic States.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

Theoretical Framework

This study conceptualizes the Zangezur Corridor through a geo-economic and connectivity-centered approach to regional integration, treating transport infrastructure as a system-forming factor because transport costs - shaped by infrastructure quality, logistics performance and

network connectivity - have significant effects on international trade and spatial economic organization (Rodrigue, 2024). In this sense, transport structures economic interaction, reduces spatial fragmentation and enables the emergence of coordinated regional governance.

Regional integration is understood not as a linear process, but as a complex phenomenon shaped by interdependence and patterns of cooperation among states. Regions are not merely geographical entities but are formed through interaction and shared practices (Fawcett, 2004). In contemporary scholarship, regionalism is also viewed as an element of global governance linking national and global levels of interaction (Telo, 2017). At the same time, regions are socially constructed through historically contingent interactions, which makes them inherently political and subject to contestation (Söderbaum, 2013).

Against this background, the Turkic region can be interpreted as an emerging institutional and political construct shaped through cooperation within the OTS. Transport connectivity plays a central role in this process by linking national economies, facilitating flows of goods, and supporting the gradual institutionalization of regional interaction.

The effectiveness of connectivity depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on the institutional capacity of regional organizations to translate political commitments into operational rules and coordinated procedures (Keohane, 1988; Abbott et al., 2000). Such institutionalization reduces transaction costs, enhances predictability and supports stable cross-border interaction.

Within the OTS, the development of strategic documents, sectoral coordination mechanisms and digital transit instruments reflects a transition from symbolic cooperation toward governance-driven infrastructural integration (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022; Omuraliev, 2025). In this study, the normative architecture of transport cooperation is understood as a system of rules, procedures and digital instruments regulating cross-border interaction and ensuring coordination between member states, thereby reducing uncertainty and increasing predictability of logistics flows.

Accordingly, the Zangezur Corridor can be conceptualized as a strategic infrastructural node with a

dual function: it operates both as an economic connectivity project and as a geo-economic instrument embedded in evolving regional governance structures.

This approach is consistent with the theory of weaponized interdependence, which conceptualizes global economic and infrastructural networks as asymmetric systems in which states controlling central nodes are able to convert interdependence into instruments of strategic leverage. Farrell and Newman demonstrate that actors exercising political authority over key network hubs can impose costs, constrain access, and shape the policy behavior of other states by controlling flows of goods, information, and finance (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

The development of transport corridors within the OTS reflects an effort to gain greater control over critical transit routes and reduce external dependencies, thereby strengthening the strategic autonomy of participating states.

These dynamics can also be understood through the concept of competitive regionalism. In this view, regional integration initiatives act not only as cooperative arrangements but also as instruments through which states pursue influence and advance their strategic interests within the international system (Telo, 2017).

From a geo-economic standpoint, such dynamics reflect the use of economic instruments to achieve strategic goals. As noted by Luttwak, geo-economics captures the logic of competition conducted through economic means, while more recent approaches emphasize the role of infrastructure and connectivity networks as instruments of power and influence in the international system (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). Within this framework, transport connectivity within the OTS can be interpreted not only as an economic process but also as a geo-economic strategy aimed at restructuring regional interaction patterns, enhancing strategic autonomy and repositioning the member states within Eurasian trade and logistics networks.

The Zangezur Corridor is not merely a transport route but a potential strategic node within Eurasian connectivity networks, whose institutional governance and integration into multilateral coordination frameworks shape its capacity to generate geo-economic influence and enhance the strategic autonomy of the member states of the OTS.

The analysis is grounded in a globalization-oriented

institutional approach, which treats transport and communication infrastructure as drivers of global interdependence and as factors strengthening the role of international organizations in global and regional governance (Achkasov & Lantsov, 2011).

This study focuses on the concept of institutional maturity, defined as the capacity of a regional organization to translate political commitments into operational connectivity mechanisms through standardized procedures, coordination bodies, and digital governance instruments. The emergence of regulatory frameworks, sectoral coordination mechanisms, and digital transit solutions (eTIR, e-Permit, Digital Trade Corridor) is interpreted as evidence of the OTS' transition from symbolic cooperation toward governance-driven infrastructural integration (Organization of Turkic States, 2022, 2024).

At the same time, regional cooperation remains constrained by differences in state capabilities, interests and levels of political consolidation, which affect the sustainability and depth of integration processes (Fawcett, 2004).

Recent studies show that the Middle Corridor is evolving into a multi-level system combining infrastructure modernization, digital transit platforms, and institutional harmonization mechanisms, transforming connectivity into a strategic governance instrument rather than a technical transport solution (Valansi, 2025; Jamestown Foundation, 2023; Omuraliev, 2025).

Finally, the study incorporates classical geopolitical perspectives on the Caspian–South Caucasus nexus, emphasizing the importance of access routes linking Central Asia and the Caspian basin with external markets. Within this logic, the corridor's macro-regional importance is assessed not only in terms of distance reduction, but in its capacity to expand more predictable and diversified access routes to Türkiye and European markets (Brzezinski, 1997; Valansi, 2025).

4. Methodology

The empirical basis of the study consists of official strategic and regulatory documents of the Organization of Turkic States (including Turkic World Vision–2040, the OTS Strategy for 2022–2026, the Gabala Declaration, and summit materials), as well as analytical and expert publications addressing the Middle Corridor and competing transit routes (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022, 2024, 2025).

The research employs a qualitative multi-method design combining:

Documentary analysis of OTS strategic and regulatory frameworks to trace the institutional embedding of the Zangezur Corridor within the architecture of Turkic integration (OTS, 2021; 2022; 2025);

Case-study analysis of the Zangezur Corridor as a core infrastructural node within the Middle Corridor (Creswell et al., 2003; Creswell, 2006);

Structural-functional analysis is employed to identify the roles performed by the Zangezur Corridor within the broader system of Eurasian connectivity, including transit integration, redistribution of economic rents, and the consolidation of institutional coordination mechanisms. Contemporary transport literature conceptualizes regional transport systems as multi-layered governance platforms integrating infrastructure, regulatory frameworks and coordination mechanisms, which generate systemic economic and institutional effects at the macro-regional level (United Nations ESCAP, 2021);

Geo-economic analysis to assess the impact of the corridor on route competition, transit dependency, and the reconfiguration of Eurasian transport flows (Blackwill & Harris, 2016; Valansi, 2025).

This methodological framework ensures analytical coherence between the theoretical lens and the empirical material, enabling a comprehensive examination of the Zangezur Corridor as a system-forming element of the emerging Turkic transport-logistics architecture.

5. Literature Review

Contemporary academic and expert literature increasingly conceptualizes the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route – TITR) as a key geo-economic axis of Eurasian connectivity aimed at diversifying East–West transport flows and reducing dependence on northern routes passing through the territory of the Russian Federation. Earlier scholarly analyses had already emphasized the strategic potential of the South Caucasus and the Caspian basin as a transit hub linking Central Asia, Türkiye and the European Union (Sadiyev & Iskandarov, 2018, pp. 47–53; Iskandarov et al., 2019, pp. 7–34). More recent assessments underline a sharp increase in the corridor’s relevance under conditions of sanctions pressure, rising political risks and capacity constraints affecting

traditional Eurasian routes after 2022 (Tokayev, 2024; Gawliczek & Iskandarov, 2023).

Recent studies interpret the Middle Corridor not merely as an infrastructure route, but as an emerging institutional–digital platform for regional integration. Analyses of the implementation of eTIR systems, electronic permits, and Single Window mechanisms indicate its gradual transformation into a coordinated system of procedures, standards, and digital tools that enhance predictability and competitiveness of transit operations (Organization of Turkic States, 2024; Mirziyoyev, 2024, pp. 21–25; Makhkamov, 2025, pp. 28–39).

Recent analyses argue that the Zangezur Corridor functions as a logical missing link of the Middle Corridor– shortening logistical distances, enhancing transit resilience, and expanding transit access for Central Asia to Turkish and European markets (Blank, 2022; de Waal, 2021; Valansi, 2025). It is further emphasized that restoring the Türkiye–Azerbaijan–Caspian–Central Asia connectivity axis represents a fundamental reconfiguration of Eurasian logistics dynamics (Koolae et al., 2024, pp. 124–129; Gawliczek & Iskandarov, 2023).

At the same time, the literature contains more cautious assessments. Some studies focus on the competition among alternative routes and indicate that bypass solutions, including Iranian transit options, may partially compensate for the absence of the Zangezur link but fail to form a sustainable Turkic connectivity axis and instead reinforce regional transit dependency (Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst, 2023; Jamestown Foundation, 2023).

A distinct body of scholarship produced by Iranian authors examines the Zangezur Corridor primarily through the lenses of regional security and geopolitical balance. These studies emphasize potential changes in the spatial configuration of the South Caucasus, the impact of corridor development on the distribution of transit flows, and the transformation of Iran’s role within Eurasian communication systems, thereby forming an independent analytical strand in the contemporary Middle Corridor discourse (Koolae & Rashidi, 2024).

At the same time, beyond security-centered interpretations, recent research increasingly focuses on the geo-economic dimension of connectivity. These ideas are reflected in practical forms of cooperation. Today’s economy operates through cross-border production and

logistics networks, where transport corridors play an important role. They help countries connect to global supply chains and strengthen economic ties. Research also indicates that integration into international supply chains is an important way to strengthen a country's position in the global economy (Khusanov & Erkaboev, 2024). In this sense, projects such as the Middle Corridor and the Zangezur route can be understood as contributing to the inclusion of participating states in wider economic networks.

Despite the growing number of publications, most existing works still interpret the Zangezur Corridor either as a bilateral post-conflict initiative or as an element of geopolitical rivalry. There remains a notable lack of studies conceptualizing it as part of the institutional architecture of the OTS and linking it to the digitalization of transport integration. This article addresses this gap by interpreting the Zangezur Corridor as a structural component of the Middle Corridor embedded in OTS strategic documents and serving as an indicator of the Organization's institutional maturity (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022, 2025; Omuraliev, 2025).

6. Results

The Zangezur Corridor as a Structural Component of the Middle Corridor and the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR)

The analysis demonstrates that the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route – TITR) functions as the principal spatial framework of economic connectivity within the architecture of Turkic integration, forming a stable multimodal corridor system “China – Central Asia – South Caucasus – Türkiye – European Union.” This policy orientation is further reflected in the strategic framework of the Organization, where transport connectivity is defined as a structural mechanism supporting the development of a unified Turkic economic space (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022, 2025).

Compared to the Northern Route via the Russian Federation, the Middle Corridor demonstrates sustainable geo-economic advantages. It shortens the China–Europe distance by approximately 2,000–2,500 km, ensures average cargo delivery times of 12–15 days, and shows higher flexibility under conditions of sanctions-driven fragmentation of Eurasian logistics. Forecasts indicate that by 2030 its throughput capacity may reach 10–11 million tons, bringing the corridor

closer to the status of an independent Eurasian trunk route comparable to northern and southern corridors (Valansi, 2025; Jamestown Foundation, 2023; Tokayev, 2024).

At the same time, the Northern Corridor has historically functioned as the dominant overland route between China and Europe due to its developed infrastructure, more mature operational conditions and fewer border crossings, which have ensured comparatively shorter transit time, with rail deliveries typically taking around 12 days (Çolakoğlu, 2023). However, recent geopolitical developments, particularly the Russia–Ukraine conflict and the subsequent sanctions regime, have significantly reduced its role as a key transit route and led to a decline in freight volumes (Eldem, 2022; Yang, 2024).

The analysis reveals that the Middle Corridor represents a complex multimodal system comprising railway mainlines (Baku–Tbilisi–Kars, the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan line under implementation), maritime hubs (the ports of Aktau, Kuryk, and Alat), and road routes integrated within the CASCA+ format. The modernization of Caspian port infrastructure, the expansion of BTK capacity from 1 to 5 million tons, and the documented growth of Trans-Caspian container transportation indicate that the operational sustainability of the Middle Corridor increasingly depends on the existence of a continuous and resilient land transport configuration between Türkiye and the Caspian Sea (Organization of Turkic States, 2024; Aliyev, 2024; Tokayev, 2024; Valansi, 2025).

It is precisely at this juncture that the system-forming role of the Zangezur Corridor is identified, understood as its capacity to restore spatial continuity, reduce infrastructural fragmentation, and enable the re-integration of the South Caucasus into the broader Eurasian transport network.

The proposed Zangezur Corridor would connect Horadiz, Nakhchivan, the Turkish logistics hubs of Iğdır and Kars, and further the European railway network, forming an additional connection along the transport axis “Western Türkiye – South Caucasus – Caspian – Central Asia.” Its inclusion could reduce logistical distance and transaction costs, while potentially enhancing the resilience of the TITR by diversifying routes, reducing dependence on transit through Iran and Georgia, and creating a reserve land connection under conditions of geopolitical turbulence (Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst, 2023; Jamestown Foundation, 2023).

An additional result of the study is the identification of a potential integration effect between the Zangezur route and the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan (CKU) railway, whose construction entered an implementation stage following the December 2024 launch (Mirziyoyev, 2024; Makhkamov, 2025). The CKU could provide an additional linkage between China and the Caspian basin, creating an eastern “anchor” of the system. In combination with the Zangezur segment, this connectivity could strengthen a multimodal Eurasian transport axis “East Asia – Central Asia – South Caucasus – Türkiye – European Union,” thereby strengthening the position of the Turkic space as a central transit platform within the evolving Eurasian logistics landscape (Tokayev, 2024; Valansi, 2025).

From a broader geo-economic perspective, the Zangezur Corridor should be considered within the evolving configuration of transcontinental connectivity frameworks, including the Belt and Road Initiative. In this context, the Middle Corridor strengthens the diversification of Eurasian transport routes and enhances the resilience of East–West connectivity between China and European markets (Akçay & Changgang, 2023; Colakoğlu, 2019; Eldem, 2022).

Thus, the obtained results allow the Zangezur Corridor to be interpreted not as a standalone project, but as a key structural component of the Middle Corridor and the TITR, ensuring spatial continuity, enhancing throughput capacity and reducing transit dependence, thereby contributing to the formation of a stable Eurasian multimodal architecture within the framework of the OTS (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022, 2025).

Digital and Energy Dimensions of the Zangezur Corridor as the Core of an Emerging Turkic Macro-Region

Energy Dimension

The results demonstrate that the Zangezur Corridor possesses high potential significance for the formation of regional energy architecture. Its geographic alignment coincides with an optimal axis for the deployment of pipelines, power transmission lines, and prospective “green” energy networks linking the Caspian region, Central Asia, and Türkiye (Latsabidze, 2025; Tokayev, 2024; Aliyev, 2024).

Integration of the corridor into the broader regional energy system is conceptually consistent with existing routes such as TANAP and TAP, as well as with

initiatives aimed at exporting green electricity from the Caspian region to European markets. Accordingly, the Zangezur Corridor may evolve from an exclusively transport route into a supporting energy linkage within a layered Eurasian infrastructural system (Latsabidze, 2025; Aliyev, 2024).

Digital Dimension

The analysis of the digital components of the Middle Corridor reveals a qualitatively new layer of logistics integration. It is established that the implementation of eTIR systems, e-Permit instruments, Single Window mechanisms, and the Digital Trade Corridor platform reduces border processing time, mitigates regulatory fragmentation, and lowers transaction costs, thereby increasing predictability and competitiveness of transit operations (Organization of Turkic States, 2021; 2022; 2024; Omuraliev, 2025; Makhkamov, 2025).

Particular significance is attached to the formation of parallel digital infrastructure, including the construction of a submarine fiber-optic cable across the Caspian Sea and the development of transnational data channels (Tokayev, 2024). The obtained results indicate that these projects form a material basis for a Turkic “Digital Silk Road,” within which the Caspian basin emerges not only as a transport node but also as a digital hub supporting resilient data transmission, the functioning of electronic transit platforms, and the expansion of digital trade (Organization of Turkic States, 2024; Tokayev, 2024; Omuraliev, 2025).

Within this architecture, the Zangezur Corridor could perform the function of a nodal land segment through which physical logistics would be synchronized with digital management, monitoring, and cargo-tracking channels. This allows it to be interpreted as a potential element of both transport and informational connectivity across the macro-region.

Institutionalization of the Zangezur Corridor within the OTS and Central Asia

The analysis establishes that the institutionalization of the Zangezur Corridor as a multilateral infrastructure project has become possible primarily due to the transformation of the OTS from a predominantly political-cultural association into a center of strategic planning and coordination of regional transport policy. This transition is codified in the strategic framework of the Turkic World Vision–2040, the OTS Strategy for 2022–2026 and the Gabala Declaration (2025), which

formalized an infrastructure-economic integration model in which transport corridors, digital platforms and energy networks constitute the institutional basis of practical connectivity in the Turkic space (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022, 2025).

Within this framework, the Zangezur Corridor is consolidated not as a local post-conflict initiative, but as an inherently multilateral element embedded in the architecture of the Middle Corridor and the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. Vision-2040 codifies its collective promotion on international economic platforms, while the Gabala Declaration institutionalized its status as a priority direction of OTS transport integration (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2025).

The results show that the Gabala Declaration elevated transport to the level of a core strategic pillar by endorsing the unblocking of communications between Azerbaijan and Armenia, supporting the operationalization of the Zangezur Corridor, and emphasizing its synchronization with the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway, and the TITR (Organization of Turkic States, 2025).

For Central Asian states, the Zangezur Corridor functions as a structural mechanism of geo-economic autonomy. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan acquire the capacity to diversify export routes, reduce dependence on transit via the Russian Federation and Iran, and obtain direct access to European Union and Eastern Mediterranean markets (Valansi, 2025; Tokayev, 2024; Jamestown Foundation, 2023; Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst, 2023).

The integration of the Zangezur Corridor with the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway and the CASCA+ format could create a multi-route architecture in which Central Asia would gain system-forming status within Eurasian logistics. In this configuration, the Zangezur Corridor would serve as a key land link in the transregional transport system linking East Asia – Central Asia – South Caucasus – Türkiye – European Union (Tokayev, 2024; Valansi, 2025).

At the institutional level, the results suggest that cooperation on the project could strengthen the OTS itself. The formation of the Alliance of Logistics Centers of Turkic States, proposals for the Council of Railway Administrations of the OTS, and the development of

digital platforms such as TurkIPAnet and the OTS Unified Investment Portal can support intergovernmental and inter-agency coordination (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022, 2024; Omuraliev, 2025).

Thus, the Zangezur Corridor is institutionalized as both a strategic infrastructural resource of the OTS and a systemic instrument enabling Central Asia's exit from historical geographical constraints, while simultaneously reflecting the institutional maturity of the Organization itself.

An additional governance dimension reinforcing the emerging Eurasian connectivity architecture is the growing rapprochement between Central Asia and the South Caucasus, reflected in the participation of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in the Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia and the decision in November 2025 to include Azerbaijan as a full participant in this regional dialogue format (Buranelli, 2025; Mirziyoyev, 2025).

Originally launched in 2018 as an informal mechanism of presidential dialogue among the Central Asian states, the Consultative Meetings have gradually evolved into a significant platform of regional coordination. Recent scholarship conceptualizes these meetings as a “secondary institution” of Central Asian regional politics, functioning as a mechanism of order-making and as a manifestation of summitry and multilateral diplomacy, while also reflecting fundamental primary institutions such as sovereignty, international law and region-specific social norms, and contributing to the negotiation of principles of coexistence (Buranelli, 2025).

During the seventh Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State held in Tashkent in November 2025, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that Azerbaijan's inclusion in the Consultative Meeting framework would help establish a key bridge between Central Asia and the South Caucasus, thereby reinforcing the strategic interconnectedness of the two regions and opening new prospects for broader trans-Caspian cooperation (Mirziyoyev, 2025; Caspian Post, 2025).

In the context of expanding transregional connectivity, Azerbaijan's inclusion in the Consultative Meetings strengthens connections between Central Asia and the South Caucasus and contributes to a more direct linkage between Central Asia, Türkiye and European markets. Cooperation with Azerbaijan is increasingly viewed by

regional actors as a means of reducing dependence on conventional transit routes via Russia or Iran, while improving access to European and global markets. In this framework, transportation, logistics and multimodal networks linking Central Asia, the Caspian Sea and the South Caucasus acquire increased strategic significance, which creates additional political and institutional conditions that reinforce the relevance of corridor-based connectivity across the broader Trans-Caspian space (Jamestown Foundation, 2026).

Uzbekistan as a System-Forming Architect of Turkic Transport Integration

The results suggest that Uzbekistan performs an important role in shaping the institutional, technological and infrastructural architecture of Turkic transport integration, evolving from a transit participant into an active contributor to regional connectivity.

A decisive turning point was the Samarkand Summit of 2022, at which transport was codified as a strategic pillar of Turkic integration through the adoption of the OTS Strategy for 2022–2026 (Organization of Turkic States, 2022). Uzbekistan initiated the transition from fragmented project coordination to the formation of a unified Turkic multimodal space based on harmonization of transit procedures, synchronization of railway standards and the establishment of an integrated digital Single Window environment (Mirziyoyev, 2024).

The analysis suggests that Uzbekistan could strengthen its role as an eastern anchor of the Middle Corridor through the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway, which could provide an additional connection between China and the Caspian Sea and further integrate Central Asia into the multimodal Eurasian transport axis “East Asia – Central Asia – South Caucasus – Türkiye – European Union” (Makhkamov, 2025). In conjunction with the Zangezur Corridor, this railway could strengthen the role of the Turkic region within Eurasian logistics (Tokayev, 2024; Valansi, 2025).

Uzbekistan has also expressed support for the Zangezur Corridor. At the trilateral meeting with Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan in Avaza on 22 August 2025, the Uzbek side supported the development of the Middle Corridor, including the Zangezur connection. It also proposed expanding port capacity, coordinating tariffs, digitalizing transit procedures, and developing ferry services across the Caspian Sea (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025).

At the institutional level, Uzbekistan proposed the creation of the Council of Railway Administrations of the OTS and promoted cooperation with the Alliance of Logistics Centers and Cargo Carriers, calling for coordinated tariffs, simpler border procedures, and mutual recognition of electronic transport documents (Mirziyoyev, 2023; 2024). These initiatives support intergovernmental coordination of logistics in the Turkic space.

Uzbekistan also emerged as a digital frontrunner of the Middle Corridor. It became the first Central Asian country to implement full-cycle electronic transit instruments (TIR-EPD, SafeTIR, Real-Time, AskTIRWeb) and one of the first worldwide to pilot eTIR in cross-border operations (Makhkamov, 2025). Bilateral electronic permit regimes with Türkiye, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan positioned Uzbekistan as a technological driver of digital corridor interoperability (Makhkamov, 2025). This institutional and technological activism is further supported by Uzbekistan’s expanding export profile, which reflects the country’s growing industrial and logistical relevance within the broader transport architecture of the Turkic world (Center for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025).

The Samarkand Summit of 2022 also reinforced this role at the normative level. Within the OTS framework, the Agreement on International Combined Freight Transport among the Governments of the Member States and the Transport Connectivity Program, adopted at the 9th OTS Summit, established an additional legal and institutional basis for the development of multimodal transregional logistics corridors, the coordination of national transport systems and the facilitation of cross-border logistics across the Turkic region (Organization of Turkic States, 2022). Together with the broader strategic framework of the OTS, these instruments strengthened the institutional backbone of transport governance within the Organization.

The Gabala Declaration (2025) institutionalized this leadership by formally recognizing Tashkent’s role in developing the TurkIPAnet platform and the Unified Investment Portal of the OTS (Organization of Turkic States, 2025).

Thus, Uzbekistan functions not merely as a corridor participant, but as a contributor to the normative architecture, technological trajectory and infrastructural configuration of Turkic integration, helping to develop

the institutional foundations of the Turkic transport system.

7. Discussion

Political-Institutional Constraints and Route Competition

Despite its pronounced geo-economic potential, the Zangezur Corridor is developing within a complex configuration of political and institutional constraints shaped by the post-conflict sensitivity of the South Caucasus, competition among alternative transit routes, and the asymmetric interests of external actors.

For Armenia, the Syunik region represents not merely a transit territory but a critical spatial anchor of national sovereignty. Any connectivity arrangements implying extraterritoriality or external military control are therefore perceived as potential threats to territorial integrity. Under these circumstances, the most institutionally viable model of corridor development is one that preserves Armenian jurisdiction, incorporates international security guarantees, and relies on a civilian mode of route administration. In expert debates, alternative governance models have also been discussed - including international management schemes and long-term concession arrangements, notably the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity initiative proposing a 99-year U.S. concession to administer the transit route through Syunik - yet these proposals have not acquired stable legal or normative institutionalization (Asbarez, 2025).

Within Armenian political-strategic discourse, the Zangezur Corridor is thus interpreted less as an infrastructure project than as a sensitive issue of sovereign control over national space and communication regimes. The Syunik region is framed as a core territorial anchor of Armenian statehood, and any models limiting national jurisdiction are perceived as risks of losing sovereign administration over strategically significant connectivity nodes (Kavtaradze, 2024). In this context, in 2023 the Armenian government advanced the Crossroads of Peace initiative, which envisages the development of a network of road, railway, energy, and communication lines linking Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Iran, Georgia, and Russia while maintaining Armenia's full sovereign control over all transport infrastructure and border-customs regimes. This model positions Armenia as a regional hub of Eurasian connectivity under national jurisdiction rather than as a

corridor operating under special extraterritorial regimes (Kavtaradze, 2024).

Iran, in turn, promotes the Aras Corridor (Aghbend–Kalaleh–Julfa) as an alternative to the Zangezur Corridor, providing a transit link between Eastern Zangezur and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic via Iranian territory. Although this route may partially compensate for the absence of a direct land connection, it does not close an integrated and institutionally coordinated East–West multimodal axis within the Middle Corridor (TITR) and increases dependence on third-party transit regimes. Accordingly, the Aras route is generally regarded as a supplementary rather than a substitutive direction and does not replace the strategic function of the Zangezur Corridor in completing the East–West Eurasian logistics contour (Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst, 2023).

In Iranian political and analytical assessments, the Zangezur Corridor is viewed as a factor potentially reshaping the regional balance of power and generating risks for the core interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran—primarily through the possible restriction of the Iran–Armenia land link, the erosion of Iran's transit advantages in the competition between the North–South and Middle Corridors, and the strengthening of Türkiye's role in the South Caucasus (Koolae & Rashidi, 2024). The same framework emphasizes security-related risks, including the expansion of external actors' presence and infrastructure, the growing sensitivity of border environments, and shifts in the political-informational background surrounding corridor projects (Koolae & Rashidi, 2024). Importantly, even if formal borders remain unchanged, Iranian analysts underline that Iran's long-term vulnerability may materialize through the reallocation of transit and energy flows in favor of the Middle Corridor bypassing Iranian territory (Koolae & Rashidi, 2024). Under a potential launch of the Zangezur Corridor, a portion of transit flows previously routed through Iran and Georgia may be redirected toward the “Türkiye–Nakhchivan–Eastern Zangezur–Caspian” axis, leading to a redistribution of transit rents and structural shifts in the economic positions of regional states (Kavtaradze, 2024). In this sense, the Zangezur Corridor functions not merely as an infrastructural addition but as a mechanism of transit-rent and influence redistribution in Eurasia, restructuring regional production chains and altering the balance of geo-economic power across the Caspian–South Caucasus–Türkiye axis (Chedia, 2024).

Russia's stance remains cautious, reflecting the objective reduction of its transit leverage amid the strengthening of the Middle Corridor, the rising roles of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, and the growing transport autonomy of Central Asian states. At the same time, the predominantly economic—rather than military-political—orientation of connectivity initiatives within the OTS allows the Zangezur Corridor to be embedded into broader Eurasian logistics processes without excluding selective cooperation where economically rational (Jamestown Foundation, 2023).

The European Union perceives the Zangezur Corridor as a tool for supply diversification and reduction of dependence on northern transit routes within the framework of the Global Gateway initiative, while China views it as a component of the Belt and Road Initiative strengthening the “China–Central Asia–Caspian–Türkiye–Europe” axis and elevating the South Caucasus as a strategic transit node within Eurasian logistics architecture (Valansi, 2025). In a broader geo-economic context, both the EU and the United States also interpret the Zangezur Corridor as part of an alternative energy and transport architecture aimed at securing access to Caspian hydrocarbon resources and forming routes that bypass Russian and Iranian transit infrastructures (Kavtaradze, 2024).

Against the backdrop of external constraints, it is essential to consider the strategic motivations of the Turkic states themselves, which shape the demand for launching the Zangezur Corridor. For Azerbaijan, the route is of fundamental significance: it not only restores the direct connectivity with Nakhchivan that existed prior to the 1990s, but also reduces dependence on alternative transit directions and strengthens the country's role as the central node of the Trans-Caspian route. For Kazakhstan, the corridor provides structural diversification of export pathways: the rapid growth of Trans-Caspian freight flows and the expansion of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway to 5 million tons per year underscore the need for an additional relief axis that enhances the resilience of external trade (Aliyev 2024; Tokayev 2024).

For Türkiye, Zangezur could provide an additional land route to Central Asia, reinforcing its status as a strategic hub of the Turkic transport and energy space. For Uzbekistan, the corridor could become an important element of its transport autonomy strategy: it could expand delivery options to Türkiye and the EU, strengthen connectivity with the Caspian region, and

contribute to overcoming the region's historical ‘continental trap.’ This logic can be considered alongside Zbigniew Brzezinski's broader discussion of Azerbaijan's strategic importance for access to Central Asia, making the Zangezur Corridor a potential shared strategic interest of the Turkic states (Brzezinski 1997).

Security considerations remain among the most critical constraints. The corridor traverses a recently post-conflict region characterized by heightened political sensitivity, where risks of sabotage, blockades, border incidents, and political manipulation of infrastructure persist. These factors objectively reduce the corridor's attractiveness for commercial actors. Mitigating such risks requires transparent administrative procedures, multilateral security guarantees, international monitoring mechanisms, and the application of digital monitoring instruments.

The Caspian region warrants separate consideration, as the strengthening of the Middle and Zangezur corridors is transforming it into a pivotal zone where the interests of the OTS, China, the European Union, the United States, Russia, and Iran intersect. Zbigniew Brzezinski emphasized that Central Asia and the Caspian basin constitute a strategically sensitive Eurasian node where competition over transport routes and resources shapes the continental balance of power (Brzezinski, 1997). The contemporary growth of freight turnover, energy flows, pipeline networks, and port capacities provides this thesis with a tangible geo-economic dimension (Latsabidze, 2025).

For the Turkic states, the Caspian Sea simultaneously creates new opportunities and areas of risk: without a coordinated governance model, it may evolve into a space of intensified rivalry in which logistics dynamics remain vulnerable to fluctuations in the external political environment.

Regional transport links require cooperation with countries outside the OTS. The Gabala Declaration introduced OTS+ as a flexible, project-based format for cooperation with third countries and international organizations (Organization of Turkic States, 2025). Transport routes pass through non-member states, while infrastructure projects often require investment and technology from external partners.

The study therefore suggests that transport could become one of the key areas of cooperation through OTS+. External partners could participate in specific projects

involving transit procedures, digital systems, and infrastructure without joining the organization.

Uzbekistan promotes connections between transport routes and simpler transit procedures. The proposed Zangezur Corridor could expand Uzbekistan's transport options. But its development would require agreements with Armenia. Cooperation with other external partners could support railway and port development, digital transit systems, and project financing.

8. Conclusion

Transport and logistics connectivity constitutes the infrastructural foundation of contemporary Turkic integration, reflecting the transformation of the Organization of Turkic States into an infrastructure-economic integration platform, based on multimodal interoperability and digital governance (Organization of Turkic States, 2021, 2022, 2025).

The Zangezur Corridor could occupy a system-forming position within this architecture by addressing a long-standing infrastructural gap in the South Caucasus and expanding the spatial configuration of the Middle Corridor. Its prospective integration with the TITR, the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars and China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railways, and CASCA+ formats could enhance the resilience, autonomy and competitiveness of Eurasian East–West connectivity (Aliyev, 2024; Tokayev, 2024; Valansi, 2025).

The corridor could develop into a layered multi-infrastructure platform integrating transport, digital and prospective energy connectivity, thereby contributing to a new macro-regional space of digital and energy integration in the Turkic world (Organization of Turkic States, 2024; Omuraliev, 2025).

The member states of the OTS account for approximately 4.2 percent of global trade turnover, underscoring the growing geo-economic relevance of the Turkic region in Eurasian connectivity processes (Center for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025).

An important result of this study is the identification of Uzbekistan as an active contributor to Turkic transport integration. Through infrastructural modernization, digitalization of transit governance and institutional initiatives within the OTS, Uzbekistan contributes to shaping the normative and technological contours of the Middle Corridor (Mirziyoyev, 2024; Makhkamov, 2025).

More broadly, the findings suggest that the Zangezur Corridor should be understood not merely as a transport infrastructure project, but as a system-transforming mechanism that reshapes both the economic and geopolitical architecture of Eurasian connectivity.

The corridor could generate multidimensional socio-economic effects, functioning as an engine of regional transformation. Beyond facilitating trade flows, it could contribute to employment generation, income growth, local business development and the reduction of outward migration, and create a cumulative multiplier effect at the regional level (Hashimov et al., 2025).

It also reflects a broader shift in the logic of post-conflict regional development. In the context of the South Caucasus—historically characterized by what scholars describe as a “regional fracture”—the restoration of transport links represents a potential mechanism for overcoming spatial and economic fragmentation (de Waal, 2021). In this regard, connectivity becomes not only an economic opportunity but also a conditional instrument of interdependence-building.

At the same time, the Zangezur Corridor is embedded in a complex geopolitical environment shaped by competing interests of regional and extra-regional powers, including Russia, the European Union, the United States, Iran and Türkiye (de Waal, 2021; Kavtaradze, 2024). This shows that contemporary transport corridors are not neutral infrastructure, but rather strategic instruments within broader geo-economic and geopolitical competition.

The corridor could also contribute to the reconfiguration of Eurasian connectivity by strengthening the Middle Corridor and diversifying East–West transport routes. This could reduce dependence on traditional transit axes and support the emergence of a more polycentric and resilient connectivity system.

Overall, the main contribution of this study is the integration of geo-economic, socio-economic and geopolitical perspectives into a unified analytical framework, demonstrating that the Zangezur Corridor represents a critical node in the transformation of the Turkic world into an emerging center of Eurasian connectivity.

Transport cooperation may also extend beyond OTS membership through the OTS+ format. Cooperation with external partners on transit, technology, and investment could make transport one of its key areas of joint work.

In this context, the corridor functions not only as a strategic connectivity resource, but also as an indicator of the institutional maturity of the OTS, reflecting its capacity to translate political commitments into a resilient, multimodal and digitally governed Eurasian transport system.

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