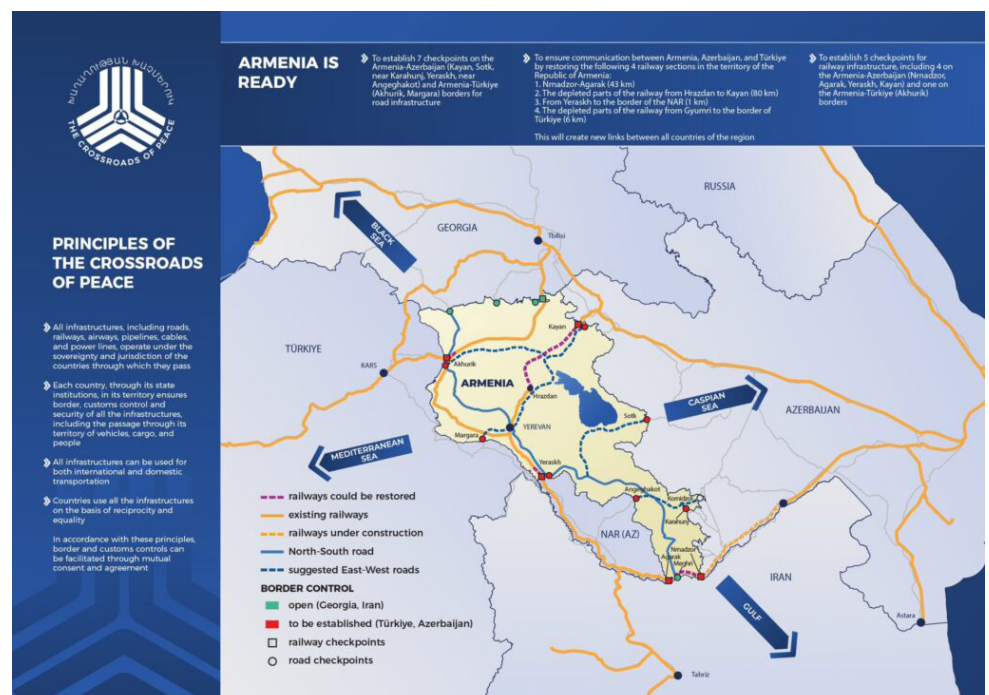




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# ZANGEZUR CORRIDOR VERSUS CROSSROADS OF PEACE: PLAN VERSUS DECLARATION

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- The end of the 2020 Second Karabakh War resulted in the signing of a Trilateral Statement between the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia, and the Prime Minister of Armenia on November 10, 2020. One of the clauses of the statement—Article 9—aimed at the opening of transport communications in the region, including a link between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic that would facilitate “unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles, and goods in both directions.” Control over transport was to be exercised by personnel of the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia.
- This link, which passes through Armenian province Meghri, was dubbed by Azerbaijan the ‘Zangezur Corridor,’ after one of its historical names, while Armenia refers to it as Syunik.

**Note:** During the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories (1993–2020), transport infrastructure that formerly existed, passing from Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan through the occupied territories, and especially the rail link, was destroyed. In addition, the Soviet era rail link passing through Armenian territory was abandoned by the Armenian authorities and has become [dilapidated](#).

- Azerbaijan argues that the Zangezur Corridor will benefit all regional countries, including Armenia (a detailed analysis of this project can be retrieved at the AIR Center [website](#)). Besides a direct link between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it would create a link between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran via the Julfa crossroads in Nakhchivan, which was functional during Soviet times. In addition, the Kars–Gyumri–Nakhchivan–Meghri–Baku (KGNMB) route would connect Türkiye with regional countries.
- Russia is also interested in this project as it has no direct link to Armenia, despite the two countries being members of the Eurasian Economic Union.
- Türkiye strongly [supports](#) the Zangezur Corridor as a project for greater Eurasian connectivity.
- Armenia has refused to provide passage, claiming that Azerbaijan wants extraterritorial status for the Zangezur Corridor, a claim rejected by Azerbaijan. Armenia derailed the work of the trilateral commission with Azerbaijan and Russia.
- The concern of Azerbaijan is the safety of the passage through Armenian territory, an issue that has not been addressed by Armenia.

- Iran also [opposes](#) the Zangezur Corridor on the pretext that it will cut the country's link with Armenia. In essence, Iran thinks the Zangezur Corridor will decrease the country's geo-economic value for two primary reasons:
  1. Tehran will lose its feature of being the main connection between Azerbaijan's territory and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.
  2. Iran will lose its transit role between Türkiye and Central Asia.
- On March 11, 2022, Azerbaijan and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding on the construction of transport links between the two countries. These will connect Azerbaijan proper with its Nakhichevan exclave through Iranian territory. The two countries held the foundation-laying ceremony for a highway bridge and customs and border infrastructure in the vicinity of the Aghband settlement of Azerbaijan's Zangilan district on October 6, 2023.
- Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan [announced](#) the 'Crossroads of Peace'—a regional transport proposal that would connect Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Georgia through Armenia—at the Tbilisi Silk Road Forum in Georgia on October 26, 2023.
- The project stipulates the renovation and development of roads, railways, pipelines, cables, and electricity lines between Armenia, Türkiye, and Azerbaijan.
- Currently, Armenia has only one working rail link to Georgia.
- Armenian borders with Azerbaijan and Armenia have remained closed since 1993 due to the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories, which lasted until 2020.
- Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan emphasized that the opening of regional routes should take place based on countries' sovereignty and jurisdiction, alluding to earlier Armenian claims that Azerbaijan demanded extraterritorial status for a Zangezur Corridor through Armenian territory.
- Armenia's Crossroads of Peace is a mostly empty declaration, as the only viable transport links go through Azerbaijan's territory and are pinned to the Zangezur Corridor. This means that Armenia's links to Iran are economically possible only through Azerbaijan's Julfa in Nakhchivan. Armenia's eastward routes go through Azerbaijan and its westward ones through Türkiye—and that link is also conditional on opening transport links with Azerbaijan.

- For three years since the Second Karabakh War, Armenia has not implemented a single step towards the realization of any transport project with Azerbaijan.
- Against this background, Hikmet Hajiyev, Foreign Policy Advisor to Azerbaijan's President, [said](#) that "The Zangezur corridor is no longer attractive for Azerbaijan—we prefer the route through Iran."
- Speaking on November 22 to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien, among other remarks critical of Azerbaijan, said that the U.S. prefers a transport route between Azerbaijan proper and Nakhichevan via Armenia, not Iran. On October 23, Armenia and Iran signed a contract for the construction of a road between the two countries (<https://en.armradio.am/2023/10/23/armenia-iran-sign-contract-on-construction-of-32km-agarak-kajaran-road/...>). Somehow, this US official is okay with that, but opposes the link between Azerbaijan and Iran.
- Despite Azerbaijani efforts to promote better connectivity, the Zangezur project is faced with Armenian opposition, backed by Iran and certain Western policy-makers and experts who have traditionally held views biased against Azerbaijan due to traditional Orientalist perspectives.
- Azerbaijan has implemented many transportation projects including the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, which is successfully functioning and expanding. However, in 2007, the European Union and the United States [declined](#) to assist in financing or promoting the line because they saw it as being designed to bypass Armenia. They supported the reopening of the Kars–Gyumri–Tbilisi (BTK) railway line instead, thanks in part to pressure on the US Congress from the Armenian lobby in the United States. For the construction of the railway on Georgian territory, Azerbaijan agreed to provide a US\$220 million loan to Georgia, repayable in 25 years, with an annual interest rate of 1%. However, in 2017 the EU [welcomed](#) the opening of the BTK, which "will provide fast and reliable land connection between Europe and Asia along the ancient Silk Route."
- Unfortunately, the attitude of the United States and the European Union has not changed much and remains biased and unconstructive.
- Azerbaijan has been successfully implementing several transport [infrastructure projects](#) through its territory with a [growing](#) cargo flow between Europe and Asia.

- If Armenia really wants to break its regional isolation and to benefit from transportation projects, the government should embark on practical steps and work with Azerbaijan, instead of relying on empty slogans and a PR campaign. Western actors—the United States and the European Union (especially France)—should, instead of antagonizing the countries of the region and setting one against another, support regional connectivity projects. So should Iran, Russia, and other regional countries.

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## NOTE

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