



OCTOBER-2021

# ANALYSIS

## THE IMPACT OF THE OPENING OF ZANGEZUR CORRIDOR ON REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION LINES

The end of the 44-Day 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 main purposes of the statement is to open all transport communications in the region that were closed due to the Armenian occupation. Article 9 of the Trilateral Statement states that:

All economic and transport links in the region shall be restored. The Republic of Armenia guarantees the safety of transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in order to organize an unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles, and goods in both directions. Control over transport shall be exercised by the bodies of the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Although the “Zangezur Corridor” was not mentioned by name in the statement, the planned corridor is given that name because it passes through the region of Zangezur, a historical name for the land inhabited by Azerbaijanis until their expulsion in 1988–89 (Armenians call this region Syunik). Even though the length of corridor is not great and it does not cover a big area on the global map, it possesses great geopolitical importance and will have significant impact on the transport communication architecture of the region that has developed over recent decades. Thus, the main purposes of this report are to identify the opportunities that the Zangezur Corridor will create for the countries of the region and for other forces that are interested in the opening of the corridor, and to determine the impact of the corridor on existing regional transportation and communication lines.

Even before the 44-Day War, some international experts highlighted the importance of the Zangezur corridor. According to a 2012 Stratfor analysis:<sup>2</sup> “Whoever controls the Zangezur Corridor can project power into the Turkish sphere of influence in Anatolia, the Russian sphere of influence in the intra-Caucasus and directly into the Persian core territories.” The author adds that this seemingly forgotten, small area was a center of regional competition long before the Turks and Russians came to this region.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.president.az/articles/45923>

<sup>2</sup> <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/caucasus-zangezur-corridor>

Although Zangezur has fertile soil and rich water resources, its role as a transport corridor makes it more important. Zangezur is located at the conjunction of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains, the Anatolian Highlands, and the Zagros Mountains. Historically, this area held great importance for the construction of roads, because it passes through three large mountainous areas. At the same time, the above-mentioned article emphasized that, although Turkey, Russia, and Iran have not paid much attention to the Zangezur Corridor in recent years, they are certain to revisit the Zangezur issue in time.

Publication of such articles manifests the importance of the Zangezur Corridor, especially in a changing geopolitical environment. Undoubtedly, Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories was the main obstacle that prevented access to the corridor. Therefore, after the war, the issue of the opening of Zangezur Corridor was raised by Azerbaijan and included in the Trilateral Statement.

It is also worth mentioning that even some Armenian experts were in favor of the restoration of the Zangezur Corridor, even before 44-Day War, and they wrote about it in various reports. One of these, published by *International Alert* in 2014, called for the "Rehabilitation of the railways in the South Caucasus: Assessment of the potential economic benefits."<sup>3</sup> The second volume of this report was dedicated to the Kars–Gyumri–Nakhchivan–Meghri–Baku (KGNMB) route and was co-authored by Armenian, European, and Azerbaijani experts. The Nakhchivan–Meghri–Baku part of this road goes through the Zangezur Corridor. Thus, by discussing of the advantages of the KGNMB route, the authors also bring attention to the importance of the Zangezur Corridor. The report analyzed the competitive benefits of KGNMB for Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Armenia along with the indirect economic and social benefits of the opening of the road. Special attention was given to the benefits of the restoration of the railway link between Iran and Armenia and access for Armenia to the Turkish market using this corridor. It is obvious that the opening of the corridor will have a significant impact on the transport policies of regional countries. In order to understand the new realities that will be created by the Zangezur Corridor in the region, both in terms of geopolitics and transportation policy, it would be useful to analyze the influence the new corridor on the regional countries separately.

## **Armenia**

As for other regional countries, the opening of the Zangezur corridor will also be beneficial for Armenia. First, the opening of the corridor will allow Armenia to free itself from its economic isolation. After the occupation of Azerbaijani territories in 1992–93, Azerbaijan and Turkey shut down their respective borders with Armenia. Closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan prevented Armenia from gaining access to a safe and sustainable land route to Russia, its main economic partner. Since the beginning of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, there has been no railway connection between Armenia and Russia. The only available land route was the Upper Lars Highway, which goes through the territory of Georgia. As this road passed through geographically difficult terrain and had to be closed in cold weather, it caused delays in the transportation of goods from Armenia to Russia and vice versa. Moreover, the political tensions between Georgia and Russia on occasion led to the closure of this road.

Another road that passes through Georgia and used to connect Armenia and Russia by land is the railway that goes via Abkhazia, which is also closed due to the political problems between Russia and Georgia. During the Soviet era, cargo transportation between Armenia and Russia was carried out mainly by

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Caucasus\\_RailwaysRehabilitationPt2\\_EN\\_2013.pdf](https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Caucasus_RailwaysRehabilitationPt2_EN_2013.pdf)  
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railroad through the Dilijan and Karvansara (Ijevan) settlements in Armenia, and then through the Gazakh region of Azerbaijan to Russia. This road was also closed because of the conflict.

It is also worth mentioning that Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan also led to the elimination of railway connections with Iran. After the beginning of the First Karabakh War (1988–94), the railroad that connected Armenia with Iran through Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan) was closed. The highway that continues to be used for the transportation of goods between Armenia and Iran is inefficient for transportation as it passes through a mountainous area. During the conflict, Armenia planned to build an alternative railway through the Meghri region to Iran, but the high construction costs made it impossible. The cost of construction of the railroad was estimated at between 3.5 and 5 billion US dollars. Because of the lack of financial resources, Armenia was unable to cover these costs, and efforts to attract foreign investors did not lead to the desired results. However, in the case of the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, Armenia and Iran would restore the railway connection and it would also enable Armenia to participate in the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC). By using the railway connection with Iran, Armenia is also trying to change the direction of INSTC and prevent it from passing through Azerbaijan.

Thus, the opening of the Zangezur corridor will allow Armenia to end its economic isolation and restore access to Russia and Iran, as well as to the markets of the Eurasian Economic Union. Despite the fact that the November 10 statement will mainly lead to the restoration of pre-existing roads between the countries of the region, this will change the region's transport architecture because, during the Armenian occupation, these roads were closed and transportation policies and regional transport projects were implemented without considering them.

Despite the advantages of the Zangezur Corridor, some experts in Armenia are skeptical about its opening. In their opinion, the new corridor does not serve the strategic interests of Armenia as it creates geopolitical risks and might lead to the loss of its sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> They argue that, although the Trilateral Statement declares the reopening of all communications in the region, it only specifically mentions the connection between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, which means that the main focus is towards the reopening of this specific road. Therefore, this is the only feasible project for the near future. According to Armenian experts, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor without opening other communications routes will create additional geopolitical risks that outweigh the economic benefits for Armenia.

Another argument against the Zangezur Corridor is that the transportation of goods from Armenia to Russia through the Zangezur Corridor covers a longer distance, and the most efficient way to transport goods from Armenia to Russia is to use the traditional Karvansara (Ijevan)–Gazakh road.<sup>5</sup> In order to make this road operational, a short section in Armenian territory needs to be repaired. It has also been pointed out that no peace agreement has been signed between the parties following the war, and there is the possibility of an outbreak of a new military conflict.

Armenian experts also think that, after the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, Armenia will lose its sovereignty in the area through which the corridor passes.<sup>6</sup> According to the Trilateral Statement, control of the corridor will be exercised by the Russian Federal Security Service for an indeterminate period of time. Therefore, the Armenian government has to be sure that, after some set time, control over the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://jam-news.net/unblocking-of-transport-communications-construction-of-roads-through-armenia-threats-expert-opinion-news-armenia/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-proposing-restoration-of-rail-route-through-azerbaijan-to-russia>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.evnreport.com/politics/the-meghri-corridor-a-viable-transport-link-or-geopolitical-noose>

corridor will be transferred to Armenia. On the other hand, Armenia wants to have the right to close this road whenever it feels there is a threat to its national interests. However, the November 10 statement does not give Armenia such rights. Thus, there is an argument that Armenia should not allow the corridor to be opened if Armenia will lose its sovereignty and be unable to protect its national interests.

Taking into consideration the above arguments, we can say that the Armenian side believes that the geopolitical risks of the Zangezur Corridor for Armenia are much greater than the economic benefits, and, therefore, the Armenian government should delay or prevent the opening of this corridor. Armenia could agree to the opening of the corridor only if other regional communications that are beneficial for Armenia are opened and the security of these roads is ensured, as for the Zangezur Corridor. However, Armenia has already signed the November 10 statement and is therefore obliged to fulfill its obligations. If Armenia prevents the opening of the corridor, Azerbaijan will have the right to act likewise in regard to other clauses of the Trilateral Statement, such as that concerning the Lachin Corridor.

If the Zangezur Corridor is not opened, then Azerbaijan will not allow the opening of other roads, which means that the economic isolation of Armenia will continue, which is not beneficial for its economy. On the other hand, Armenia's resistance to the corridor will be perceived as a policy directed against cooperation in the region and that does not serve the interests of other regional countries. Therefore, these countries, especially Russia, might put pressure on Armenia to open the corridor. It is also worth mentioning that the fears of Armenia regarding the loss of its sovereignty over the corridor and increasing Russian control are surprising, as Armenia's borders with Turkey and Iran are guarded by the Russian military and Armenia's railway system, gas distribution company, and other crucial economic sectors are controlled by Russian companies. Thus, the concerns raised by Armenia regarding its sovereignty are unjustified and merely an excuse used by forces that want to prevent the opening of the Zangezur Corridor.

If the corridor is opened, it will give impetus to other roads, which will be directly beneficial for Armenia. It appears that the Armenian government is interested in the opening of the corridor—or, at least, realizes the necessity of opening it. The cautious acts of Armenian officials regarding the corridor are related to the fears of discontent against the government within the population. Opinions against the corridor in Armenia are mainly voiced by nationalist groups, which are supported by a large part of the population. It has also become a tool in the hands of the opposition for attacking the current government. Therefore, as the political situation in the country stabilizes and the benefits of opening the Zangezur Corridor and other roads become apparent, the Armenians might change their attitude toward the corridor.

## **Azerbaijan**

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor will create many advantages for Azerbaijan. The new corridor will restore the direct land connection with Nakhchivan and put an end to the 30-year blockade by Armenia. During the Soviet era, there was a railway passing through Zangezur that connected Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan and was actively used for the transportation of passengers and cargo. After the beginning of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, such transport communications were eliminated and Azerbaijan lost its direct land connection with Nakhchivan. This led to a long-term shortage of food and other products in Nakhchivan. Therefore, Azerbaijan had to establish communication with Nakhchivan by land or by air through the territories of Iran, Georgia, and Turkey. Because the route to Nakhchivan via Turkey is longer and passes through the territory of third countries, the land connection to Nakhchivan has been mostly

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established through Iran (the distance to Turkey via the Zangezur Corridor will be 340 km shorter than Baku–Tbilisi–Kars (BTK) railway). Therefore, the establishment of a direct connection with Nakhchivan will have a significant impact on the socioeconomic development of the autonomous republic. The opening of the Zangezur Corridor will also make a significant contribution to the development of economic relations with Turkey. The blockade of Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan's dependence on Iran for communication with Nakhchivan also enabled Iran to use the situation as a tool of political pressure and it created risks regarding Nakhchivan's economic security. The opening of the Zangezur Corridor will allow both the Nakhchivan and Zangilan regions to develop economically. The future use of these opportunities may further strengthen Azerbaijan's geo-economic position in the region.

Some experts believe that the creation of the Zangezur Corridor will reduce the importance of the BTK railway. However, Azerbaijan's goal in the creation of the Zangezur Corridor is not to leave the BTK unused, as both roads are important for Azerbaijan and the new corridor will serve to diversify Azerbaijan's strategically important transport routes to Turkey and the Black Sea. The BTK also provides shorter access to Black Sea ports. Nevertheless, the volume of cargo transported through the Middle Corridor is growing every year. Therefore, it will be more efficient to have two directions to sustainably transport growing volumes of cargo in the future.

## **Georgia**

The opening the Zangezur Corridor has not been welcomed in Georgia. Some experts in the country believe that the opening of the Corridor will create new opportunities for cooperation in the region and its nature will be more complementary to than in competition with roads in Georgia and will thus play an important role for international shipments in the region.<sup>7</sup> According to these experts, overall development of the region will be beneficial to all countries of the South Caucasus. However, the most popular opinion in Georgia is that the opening of the corridor would weaken the country's position as a transit country. It is no surprise that, in recent decades, Georgia has been acting as an intermediary in the transportation of Azerbaijani energy resources and other products by land to Turkey and Europe. Due to Armenia's occupation, Azerbaijan had to use Georgian territory to gain access to both Turkey and the Black Sea region. This allowed Georgia to benefit economically, strengthen its position in the region, and become one of the key players in the transportation of goods through the international transportation corridors that pass through the South Caucasus. In the opinion of skeptics, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor would have a negative impact on this position of Georgia. In particular, according to Georgian experts, the relevance of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway will decline and the Zangezur Corridor will become a major competitor for this route.<sup>8</sup> All these facts also manifest that the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict has served Georgia's interests for the past 30 years, and the growing transport dependence of the conflicting parties on Georgia has further strengthened its geopolitical position. However, the new realities created after the 44-Day War, and the opening of the Zangezur Corridor in particular, are having a significant impact on Georgia's geopolitical position.

In this context, one of Georgia's biggest concerns is that, in the new geopolitical reality, Russia's influence in the region will increase. For Russia, the new corridor weakens Georgia as a regional transport hub,

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/news-analysis/nakhchivan-corridor-to-provide-new-opportunities-increase-regional-cooperation-experts-say>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/30940859.html>

provides a new rail link with Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey and gives Russian security forces a new foothold in the South Caucasus.<sup>9</sup> As a result, some part of cargo transportation through Georgia could be redirected to the Zangezur Corridor and will be under the control of Russia. This will reduce Georgia's political influence in the region. Until now, Russia has depended on Georgia due to the lack of a land border with Armenia. Despite the fact that the road passing through Georgia experienced interruptions, it remained the only available route. Thus, the opening of all communications in the region will end Russia's dependence on Georgia.

Also worth mentioning are the issues concerning the impact of the opening of the Zangezur Corridor on the Abkhazian railway. On the one hand, the Zangezur Corridor will become Russia's alternative to the Abkhazian railway. Even if this railway is not opened, Russia will be able to establish a land connection with Armenia. On the other hand, Russia and Iran are interested in the opening of an Iran–Armenia–Georgia–Russia route. For this to become operational, the Abkhazian railway should be opened. Therefore, in possible future scenarios, Russia may increase pressure on Georgia to open the railway through Abkhazia. Although Russia has applied such pressure on Georgia in the past, Georgia was able to withstand it because Russia depended on it as a transit country. Under the new conditions, Georgia's position as a transport intermediary could weaken, which will make the prospects for opening the Abkhazian railway more attractive. In fact, for many years, Georgian officials have been working to open this route. However, these initiatives were met with great discontent from the local population. In the new reality, the Georgian government might find itself in an even more difficult position.

Despite the concerns raised in Georgia regarding the Zangezur Corridor, the establishment of the corridor is not intended to decrease the importance of the roads passing through Georgia but rather to further expand the transportation network in the region. Azerbaijan and Turkey are not going to abandon the transport projects with Georgia in which they have invested heavily. These roads cannot be easily replaced and, therefore, the Zangezur Corridor will become not a competitor but a road complementary to the main transport routes in the region.

After the opening of the corridor, both established roads and the new corridor will be used depending on the final destination of the cargo transportation. On the other hand, even if all communications routes are restored in the region, Georgia will continue to play an important role as transit country for Azerbaijan's energy resources. In particular, the commissioning of the Southern Gas Corridor manifests that Georgia's role as an intermediary in the region will continue, at least in the medium term. It is also worth mentioning that Georgia provides access to several major ports on the Black Sea that are difficult to reach through the Zangezur Corridor. Therefore, only some part of the cargo passing through the territory of Georgia could be directed to the Zangezur Corridor, which would lead to the loss of a similar proportion of transportation fees. This will not be a significant financial loss for Georgia, especially with the perspective that, in future, the cargo flow between Europe and Asia through the South Caucasus might increase. These facts show that, with the opening of the new corridor, Georgia will be affected geopolitically, but not economically.

## **Iran**

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor will put an end to the blockade of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan. Since the beginning of the 1990s, due to the Armenian blockade of Nakhchivan,

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.evnreport.com/politics/the-meghri-corridor-a-viable-transport-link-or-geopolitical-noose>  
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Azerbaijan had to use Iranian territory for land access to its exclave. Iran acted as an intermediary in the supply of electricity to Nakhchivan. Therefore, after the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, the direct land connection with Nakhchivan will be restored and Azerbaijan's dependence on Iran will decrease. Some Iranian officials hope that the Zangezur Corridor will be used only for local cargo transportation between the main territory of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan and they are therefore against the participation of this corridor in international cargo transportation. At the same time, Iranian officials state that, even if the new corridor is opened, Iran will remain the best option for Turkey and European countries for the transportation of goods to countries located on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea because Iranian fuel is cheap and it has all the necessary infrastructure in place for cargo transportation. At the same time, Iranian officials hope that Armenia will prevent the transportation of goods to Central Asia from Turkey.<sup>10</sup> Along with the abovementioned disadvantages, it should be noted that Iran could also gain a number of advantages through the Zangezur Corridor. With the opening of the corridor, Iran could restore its railway connection with Armenia. During the Armenian occupation, the railway connection between Armenia and Iran that had passed through Nakhchivan during the Soviet era was closed, and, for transport connection, they used available highways. As these highways were not reliable for such transportation, the idea of building a new railway through Meghri region (in the south of Armenia) was put forward by Yerevan. However, because of the high construction costs, the project was never implemented. It is also worthy of mention that reopening of the railway connection will not play a significant role in developing economic relations between Iran and Armenia, as the economic relations between them are not very developed and bilateral trade volume is low. In 2018, Armenia's share in Iran's exports was about 0.16% and its share in imports was 0.05%. However, the opening of this corridor will play a more important role for Iran in terms of the North–South Transport Corridor. In recent years, Iran actively promoted the establishment of the Persian Gulf–Black Sea Transport Corridor. The main problem related to this project was the lack of a sustainable transportation connection between Armenia and Iran. Iran hopes to gain access to the Black Sea via Armenia and Georgia, avoiding the main territories of Azerbaijan and Turkey, through the proposed transport corridor. The restoration of the Zangezur Corridor and the railway connection with Armenia could create opportunities for Iran to implement this project. However, it should be noted that Russia has opposed the opening of a railway between Iran and Armenia without the restoration of the railway through the territory of Abkhazia.<sup>11</sup> This relates to the fact that, without the opening of the Abkhazian railway, the Persian Gulf–Black Sea transport corridor allows Iran to get access to Europe bypassing Russia. On the other hand, after restoration of the railway connection with Armenia, Iran intends to join the Iran–Armenia–Georgia–Russia route and gain alternative access to Russia within the North–South Transport Corridor. The infrastructure projects implemented in recent years by Russia and Iran in the transportation sector (the Lagan port project, the repair and expansion of Iranian ports in the southern part of the Caspian Sea, etc.) demonstrate that Russia and Iran are striving to reduce their dependence on Azerbaijan within the North–South corridor. The fact that the Caspian ports of Russia freeze in winter makes it dependent on the land roads of Azerbaijan. Therefore, the restoration of the railway between Iran and Armenia will, in part, allow Iran and Russia to eliminate their dependence on Azerbaijan. It is no coincidence that one of the main issues discussed by the Iranian Foreign Minister during

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/13990828000627/Official-New-Trans-Brder-Crridr-N-Affec-Transi-via-Iran>

<sup>11</sup> <https://jamestown.org/program/iran-armenia-railway-project-remains-controversial/>

his visits to the region at the beginning of the 2021 was the opening of the Iran–Armenia railway.<sup>12</sup> It is obvious that the feasibility of these projects is unclear, as a number of issues exist. The commissioning of the Iran–Armenia–Georgia–Russia road is possible only with the opening of the railway through Abkhazia (Georgia). However, the tense relations between Russia and Georgia make the opening of the Iran–Armenia–Georgia–Russia route almost impossible.

## **Turkey**

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor will create substantial advantages for Turkey. First of all, via the corridor, Turkey will have a direct land route to Azerbaijan, its main partner in the region. Turkey had a direct land connection to Nakhchivan, but not to the main territory of Azerbaijan, due to the Armenian occupation. Therefore, transportation links with Azerbaijan were established through the territories of Georgia and Iran, which increased the distance and transportation costs. Thus, the establishment of the new corridor will create opportunities for further expansion of economic relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey, including tourism. The Zangezur Corridor is important for Turkey not only for gaining access to Azerbaijan but also for establishing a shorter connection to Central Asia via the Caspian Sea. Currently, land connections with Turkic countries are established through Georgia and Iran. Using the Zangezur Corridor, Turkey will have shorter alternatives available.

In recent years, there has been growing dissatisfaction between Iran and Turkey over cargo transit. In particular, bombings of Iranian trucks on Turkey's territory have fueled this dissatisfaction.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, both Iran and Turkey are trying to reduce their mutual dependence. In this regard, the Zangezur Corridor creates opportunities for both countries. However, it should be noted that, in order to realize this advantage, Iran cannot be limited only to the Zangezur Corridor; the Iran–Armenia and Abkhazian railways must also be restored. Also, if the Iran–Armenia railway were to become operational before the opening of the Abkhazian railway, Iran would try to get access to the Black Sea through Armenia and Georgia without Russia's participation. This case would be against the interests of Russia and Azerbaijan, as it would eliminate the dependence of Iran on them, and they will try to prevent it. Therefore, after the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, in comparison with Iran, Turkey will be able to eliminate its dependence on Iran more quickly because, by using the Zangezur Corridor, Turkey will be able to redirect its cargo that is transported through Iran to the new corridor, thus decreasing its dependence on Iran. However, even after the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, without the Abkhazian railway (which probably will not be opened in the near future), Iran will be unable to use the Iran–Armenia–Georgia–Russia route or independently establish the Persian Gulf–Black Sea corridor for sustainable transportation. Thus, Iran will still be dependent on Turkey for obtaining sustainable access to the Black Sea. The opening of a new corridor will therefore give Turkey a substantial advantage in relations with Iran.

Overall, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor will significantly strengthen Turkey's position in the region and increase its influence. Although it will not fully serve the interests of Russia, the importance of the corridor for Russia itself necessitates reaching an agreement with Turkey, and this might create a "win-win" situation.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2021/1/free/politics\\_news/en/885.htm](https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2021/1/free/politics_news/en/885.htm)

<sup>13</sup> <https://en.trend.az/iran/society/2546738.html>, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2015/08/12/Iran-shuts-border-post-into-Turkey-after-truck-attacked->



## **Russia**

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor also creates new opportunities for Russia, which is therefore also interested in the opening of the corridor. In general, the deterioration of relations between Russia and Georgia after the war in 2008 has significantly limited Russia's ability to get a land connection with Armenia. As mentioned earlier, because of the closure of the Abkhazian railway and problems regarding the Upper Lars highway, Russia was unable to establish lasting land links with Armenia, its main ally in the South Caucasus. Because of these problems, Russia also depended on Iran for the transportation of goods, especially military equipment, to Armenia. Considering all of the above-mentioned problems, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor will create new opportunities for Russia. Through this corridor, Russia will get a direct connection to Armenia via Azerbaijan and this will allow Russia to establish more sustainable economic relations with Yerevan. Russia will also gain additional access to Iran through a new corridor that will become an alternative route to the Middle East.

One of the advantageous aspects of the corridor for Russia is that control of it will be implemented by the Russian Federal Security Service. Thus, Russia will both control one of the main corridors in the South Caucasus and strengthen its position in the region. Another important opportunity for Russia regarding the Zangezur Corridor is the possibility of opening the Iran–Armenia–Russia route. If the Iran–Armenian railway is opened, then Iran can potentially access the Black Sea through Georgia.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the effect of the Zangezur Corridor on each country in the region manifests that the opening of the corridor will have significant impacts on the transport systems of these countries, their transportation relations with regional countries, and their transportation policies in general. However, there is major opposition to its opening inside Armenia due to a number of factors. Psychologically, the Armenian public is not ready to look beyond nationalistic rhetoric and territorial claims over Azerbaijan and Turkey.

There is some uneasiness in Iran and Georgia but, as this report has explored, those short-term fears will be compensated by longer-term economic benefits. Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Russia are the main immediate beneficiaries from the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, with other regional countries being rewarded in the future. It is also worth mentioning that the opening of the new corridor will accelerate the ability of the wider region to compete with other global hubs.

Generally, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor will positively contribute to the development of the region. The expansion of economic and business ties between the countries through the new corridor will support the development of the entire region. The Zangezur Corridor will add a new artery to the international transport corridors that pass through the region, which will strengthen the position of the South Caucasus in the system of international economic relations.

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