

# The role of Azerbaijan's victory during the second Karabakh war in ensuring security and opening a new transport corridor in the south Caucasus region

## **1. The Consequence of the war and security of the region during post-war**

The Second Karabakh War, which began on September 27, 2020, and lasted only 44 days, without addressing the complex history of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The 44-day war has changed the firm status quo in the Southern Caucasus (or Transcaucasia) formed by the ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia signed in May 1994. Although the 1994 ceasefire had been repeatedly violated since its inception, none of them had a significant effect on its permanent nature. Even the 2016 April War with its devastating effects lasted only four days before it was terminated through Russia's intervention. Likewise, the Tovuz clashes of 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan lasted only a few days without affecting the deadlock in negotiations in any way.

The start of the Second Karabakh War came as a surprise to many at least because of its mostly dormant history of the past nearly 30 years. Yet analysts had warned about the misleading peace on various occasions. The recent brief wars of April 2016 and July 2020 were not evaluated by Armenia and the international mediators, especially the co-chairs of the Minsk Group – with the exception of Russia – correctly. Azerbaijan's firm stance and its readiness for the renewal of war had been ignored and underestimated. The main causes of the war are associated with both international and domestic circumstances. The OCSE Minsk Group co-chairs have proved to be ineffective in mediating the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. They chose to manage the conflict for decades not to let intense violence erupt and engulf the region and eventually their policy failed. Yet it is hard to claim that Russia, a Minsk Group co-chair, had the same agenda. We claim that Russia has always had its secret agenda and its presence in the Minsk Group was nothing but a part of its own undeclared Karabakh policy which is discussed below (Ismailzade et al., 2021)

The Second Karabakh War was brief and destructive with drastic changes in the geopolitical realities of the region having numerous major causes. Some of the causes were related

to domestic and regional issues, while others were related to international conditions. The consequences of the war have affected the sides of the war, the disputed territory, and neighbouring countries, both politically and economically (Ibadoghlu 2021).

The war officially halted on November 9, 2020, producing a nine–point trilateral document signed by the heads of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia which does not mention anything about the political status of Nagorno Karabakh. Four months after the end of the 44-day Karabakh war, the impacts of the armed conflict on the conflicting parties and the region are profound. Each party to the conflict and those who were passively involved in the war are influenced by the war differently. The consequences of war can be assessed both economically and politically at the national and regional levels. The restoration of existing communication lines and the commissioning of new ones, provided for in Article 9 (Trilateral Statement, November 10, 2020) of the tripartite declaration on the ceasefire, can be considered one of the main consequences of the Karabakh war for the region in the economic sphere. The deal calls for a corridor linking Karabakh to Armenia proper, the 10– mile–long Lachin corridor, in return Armenia also accepted to ensure the unimpeded 30–mile–long Zangezur corridor between Azerbaijan and its exclave Nakhchivan, with the latter obtaining a direct territorial link to Turkey. Meanwhile, representatives of the Russian railway which controls Armenian railways until 2038 recently visited the Meghri region of Armenia to assess the possibilities of the reopening of the Nakhchivan – Meghri – Azerbaijan railway (Kinik et al., 2021).

Undoubtedly, the changes in this area, along with the re-establishment of lines and junctions in the transport infrastructure of the South Caucasus, will have a significant impact on intra-country and intercountry, as well as intra-regional and interregional trade and economic relations. This will create opportunities for Azerbaijan to diversify its cargo transportation to the West via Turkey and to the South via Iran. Also, Azerbaijan's short-term and medium-term expenditures and long-term revenues as a transit country in the region will be increased. The new developments in the regional transportation will allow the formation of competition between the existing Baku-Tbilisi-Kars and the new Baku-Nakhchivan-Kars, as well as the existing Baku-Astara-Tehran and Baku-Nakhchivan-Tehran railways, and ultimately optimize cost and time elements in freight and passenger transportation. The trilateral agreement has also created some opportunities for Armenia in economic terms. The Armenian railways can be connected to the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway from Gyumri and Ijevan. This will provide Armenia with

direct access from Gyumri to Turkey, and from Ijevan to Georgia and Russia via the Baku-Tbilisi railway. The implementation of Article 9 of the ceasefire agreement allows Armenia to transport goods by railways to Iran and back via Nakhchivan which is part of Azerbaijan (Ibrahimli 2021).

Finally, the implementation of Article 9 can also contribute to the development of transport links between the South Caucasus and Central Asia at the interregional level, provided that Azerbaijan is on the transition route for China's "One Belt, One Road" project, "Lapis-Lazuli Transportation Corridor," and "North-South Transportation Corridor" (India-Iran-Russia). Within the framework of the Europe-Caucasia-Asia Transportation Corridor, more than 50 million tons of goods are carried annually through the territory of Azerbaijan. The resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, which is located in the midst of such important nodal points, is important, in particular, because the transportation of goods by rail from Armenia to Central Asia and back can be provided by transit through the territory of Azerbaijan.

### **3. The economic analysis of the region countries and new opportunities after the war**

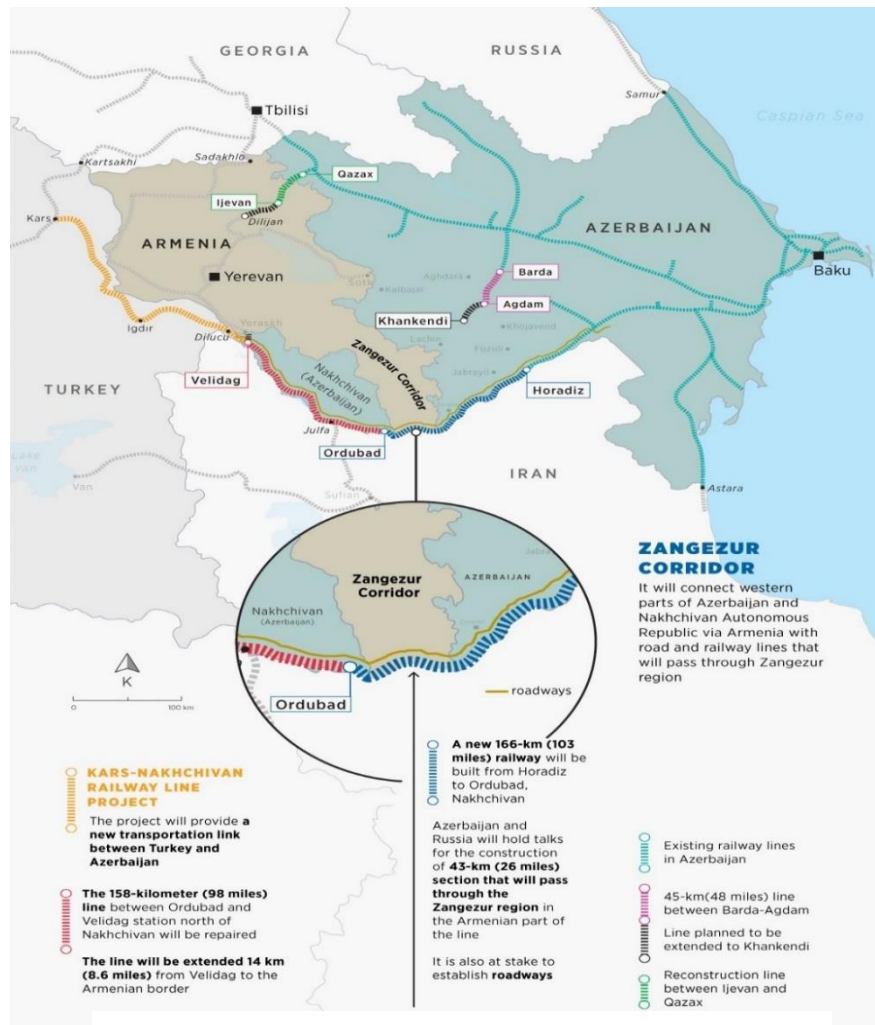
The South Caucasus has long been a crossroads. It is crisscrossed by railways and pipelines pumping oil and gas from Russia to the region and from the Caspian Sea to Europe. But the state of war between Armenia and Azerbaijan cut Yerevan, East Zangezur and Karabakh off from this trade's benefits. After the 1994 war, most economic relations between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey and Armenia ceased. The ceasefire statement calls for reinvigorated trade. It specifically requires a new corridor linking Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan, its exclave on the other side of Armenia, which also borders Turkey and Iran. That corridor would help further deepen ties between Baku and Ankara. But in that same paragraph, the statement calls for "completely unblocked" transit and trade in "the region". This wording suggests Armenia itself will again trade with both Azerbaijan and Turkey (Iskandarov et al., 2021).

In his speech, Azerbaijani President Aliyev reported that he had developed a plan for renewed trade and shared it with his Russian and Turkish counterparts and that they responded positively<sup>1</sup>. The plan reportedly is to create a "six-party platform" of Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran and, if it met certain (unspecified) conditions, Armenia. On its basis, Azerbaijan

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<sup>1</sup> <https://xalqqazeti.com/az/news/73652>

would launch major redevelopment and reconstruction efforts. Before the war, almost 40 per cent of de facto Nagorno Karabakh's budget came from mining metals that were transported to Armenia for sale. Azerbaijan has for years declared that Armenian mining and other exploitation of natural resources in the region were illegal, calling for an end to these activities. Zangezur was part of Azerbaijan, but in the 1920s, the Soviets gave the region to Armenia. After this move, Azerbaijan lost its link with Nakhchivan. Azerbaijan has focused on projects in the Zangezur corridor which will include motorways and rail lines. Zangazur Corridor is an important step towards cooperation, security, restoration of historical justice and sustainable global relations.



*Source: Geodesy and Cartography Agency of Azerbaijan*

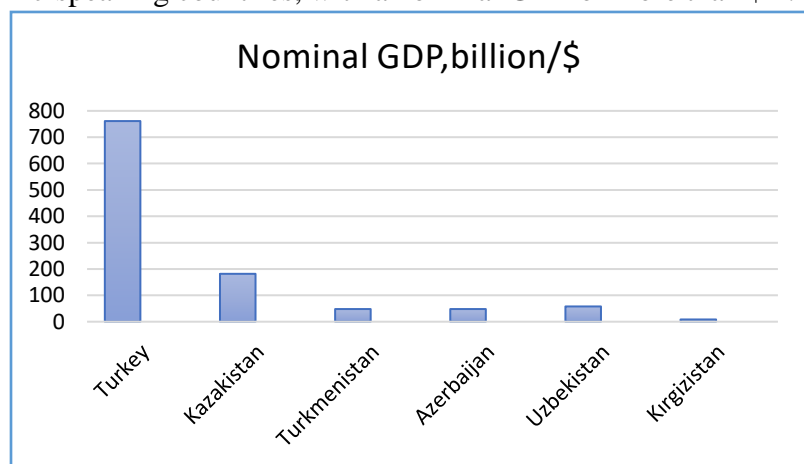
There are very good reasons for this. The point is that the Zangezur corridor should, above all, serve to remove obstacles to regional cooperation that have stood in the way for years. While one side of the issue is related to the reintegration of East Zangezur and Karabakh into Azerbaijan, the other aspect involves the opening of communications. Both issues are related to the signing of an appropriate agreement that will allow for regional cooperation and stability. In particular, Armenia must sign the relevant documents on delimitation and demarcation of borders, recognition of territorial integrity and regional cooperation. It turns out that the Zangazur corridor should ultimately be a shining example of regional cooperation as a whole. It must be based on strict, fair, legally normal rules. For this reason, experts analyze

the Zangazur corridor not only in terms of geopolitics, but also in terms of political, legal, economic, transport and logistics and other factors.

### 3. The importance of the Zangazur corridor from the new transit and logistic aspects

The Zangazur corridor is one of the issues discussed by experts after the Second Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which began on September 27 last year and lasted 44 days and ended with a great victory of Azerbaijan. It is no coincidence that various Chinese media outlets, politicians, analysts and businessmen have always attached great importance to the so-called "Middle Road" transport corridor within the "One Belt, One Road" project, and in this context have recently emphasized the Zangezur Corridor. Along with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Russia and Iran, this corridor can be of great benefit to the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Of course, China has more to gain here. From another it is a corridor that will connect the Turkic-speaking countries, with a nominal GDP of more than \$ 1.1

trillion, strategically and economically. This means that the Zangazur corridor will connect the region with significant economic potential and natural resources. The commissioning of the Zangazur corridor will also turn Azerbaijan into a hub for transport hubs in



Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator>

the region. Today, Azerbaijan is closely involved in the formation of the East-West and North-South transport corridors, which directly affects the development of the regional part of these transport corridors, as well as demonstrates financial support. With the creation of the Zangazur corridor, a new "vein" of the Eurasian transport network will be opened, which will have a positive impact on economic and trade relations between the countries of the region. Using this corridor, Turkey will implement a direct road to Azerbaijan, one of its main economic partners. Undoubtedly, this, in turn, will create conditions for the faster development of bilateral economic and tourism ties. On the other hand, the Zangazur corridor will also serve as a trade gateway for Turkey to Central Asia, allowing it to strengthen its economic ties with the Turkic world. If Armenia takes advantage of the Zangazur corridor, in other words, attaches importance to regional

cooperation, it may face positive socio-economic indicators. First of all, it will have the opportunity to break the economic blockade and achieve economic development (Mikayilov et al., 2021)

## **5. Conclusion**

As can be seen, the outcome of the Second Karabakh War, which ended with the victory of Azerbaijan, has radically changed both the geopolitical situation and the balance of power in the region and revealed new realities. Countries now approach each other not with territorial claims, but with new economic perspectives. From this aspect, the creation of new transport hubs in the region will be very important, both economically and geopolitically. The opening of the Zangazur corridor will connect not only Azerbaijan and Armenia but also other interested countries in the region economically. This will contribute to the revival of the region's economy and ensure lasting peace. However, there are still parties who are not interested in opening the corridor, and they want to prevent it with every effort. Stakeholders must make all necessary efforts to implement such a regional project and overcome all obstacles.

In my opinion, the angel should be approached not only from a geopolitical point of view but also taking into account the realities of today. Thus, new realities have emerged in the world economy in connection with the coronavirus pandemic and there is a rapid increase in prices for products and services. One of the links in this chain of price increases is reflected in the implementation of a trade by sea. Today, about 80 percent of world trade takes place over the oceans and seas. This rise in prices has become a problem not only for producers but also for buyers. Of course, every problem arises, and a way out is sought. At present, countries around the world are interested in cheaper land and rail transportation. The possibilities of existing and alternative routes are being explored. In this case, the importance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway will increase. With the opening of the Zangazur corridor, the capabilities of both the East-West and North-South transport corridors will be expanded. Thus, the diversification of transport corridors is an important factor that increases its reliability.

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