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BOOK of PROGRAMME & ABSTRACTS

The Interests of the States of the Region in the Opening of the Zangezur Corridor

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Abstract

Transport corridors have historically played an important role in the establishment of commercial ties, and control over them has been a source of wealth for ethnic groups living in these crucial territories. And the question of the security of such corridors steadily gained strategic importance, eventually becoming one of the top priorities of superpower foreign policies interested in controlling trade routes.

Due to the formation of new independent states in the South Caucasus, as well as Armenia's closure of the railway passing through Zangezur (a geographical part of Azerbaijan's historical west, transferred to Armenia in 1921) and connecting Nakhchivan with the main part of Azerbaijan, the country lost land connection with its exclave for 30 years.

In addition to its local importance for transportation connectivity, the Zangezur corridor may be viewed on two additional levels: 1. regional; and 2. inter-continental. The corridor's importance on a local level stem from the fact that it functions as a catalyst for local development in any country through which a new transportation route passes. It should be highlighted that the new corridor crosses through the least developed regions of three countries: Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Armenia. Thus, the corridor should connect the southwestern regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which have been occupied and devastated for almost 30 years, Western Zangezur, the least developed region of the Republic of Armenia, and the eastern provinces of Türkiye, which have been underdeveloped for decades due to incessant terrorist attacks.

The Zangezur corridor and the procedures that occurred as a result of the "44-day war" between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020 exacerbated the region's political and diplomatic strife. As a result of this conflict, Azerbaijan was granted the right to use Zangezur, the ancient land of Azerbaijan, solely for communication purposes. At the same time, the revival of the region's republics, which were still in an active "neutral" condition, was aided by its exclave Nakhchivan and the creation of a land link from there to the Republic of Türkiye.

The article seeks to assess the regional states' national interests in the context of new geoeconomic realities that may emerge in the region with the opening of the Zangezur corridor. With a tripartite statement on November 9, 2020, the "44-day war" provided some clarity to the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, which had been under a ceasefire since 1994. However, it generally exacerbated the situation in the region.

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The states who have reaped the most benefits from the 30-year "status quo" have shown strong opposition to changing borders in accordance with international law principles.

States that attempted to identify relations based on their interests by using terms like "strategic partner" and "friendly-neighborly relations" were forced to take an open stance in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The Russian-Ukrainian war, which started in February 2022, exacerbated an already terrible position.

The article aims to ascertain the economic and political motivations of the region's states, both interested and uninterested in the opening of the Zangezur corridor, in the context of their national interests.

Keywords: One belt one road (OBOR), Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), cooperation, logistics, Zangezur corridor, Middle corridor