

TURKEY AS A TRANSPORT HUB: A VISION STRATEGY FOR INTEGRATING REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURES AND SERVICES

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Abstract

Surrounded by seas on three sides, Turkey wants to connect different seas and coastal regions by land transport corridors. Moreover, Turkey pretends to connect the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian and also Arctic Oceans by various transport corridors, which may referred to China, the EU, India and Russia accordingly. Thus, Turkey's transport strategy has 3 levels: national, regional and international.

The research objective is to reveal Turkey's prospects of becoming a transport hub, to analyze Turkey's geographical location, the favorable circumstances and obstacles, the positions of the Turkish leadership and regional and extra-regional actors. We conclude that Turkey has glimmering chances to become a transport hub both in the West-East and North-South directions, and even in their various branches.

Becoming a transport hub is very important from Turkey's point of view to be included in the top ten economically leading countries. Likewise, it full compliances with Turkey's current ambitions: Turkey is already a regional superpower with global ambitions, and in the long-term perspective it aspires to become a global player.

The topic is actual for Armenia, as it directly refers on it. The aspiration of Turkey to become a transport hub can also put Armenia on the world transport map, turning it into a transport hub as well, at least in the East-West (China-Europe) direction.

Keywords: Transport hub, Middle Corridor, Armenia, Turkey, Russia, EU, China, Iran, UAE, Pakistan.

Introduction

In recent years, Turkey has invested heavily in the railway sector and especially in the BTK line in order to increase traffic along the Middle Corridor. Moreover, in 2021, Turkey increased investments in rail transport by 60 percent. All this is aimed at turning Turkey into a transport hub and a logistics center.

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In this article, the institutional development and hub potential of Turkey is analyzed by weighing political, statistical and infrastructure data. To this end, this article pays special attention to the institutional development of the Middle Corridor, as this project is the most important transport corridor for Turkey in terms of the volume of trade between China and Europe.

The conducted comparative analysis shows that Turkey can become a link between China and the Middle East through the Middle Corridor, as well as between Russia and the Middle East. And, finally, the Middle Corridor is very important for Turkey in terms of relations not only with the member states of the Organization of Turkic States, but also with the post-Soviet countries. Thus, the Middle Corridor has at least 5 different geographical zones: China (East Asia), Central (Middle) Asia, South Caucasus, Turkey (West Asia) and EU (Europe), whose countries have different economic and infrastructural development and this creates a number of obstacles to the development of the railway system of the Middle Corridor.

This article assesses the multilateral transport policy of Turkey, making a forecast for Turkey's plans to become a major transport hub. It is necessary to understand the regional and geo-economic importance of the Middle Corridor for Armenia, assessing the real chances of Armenia joining this project. In this context, it is necessary to identify, firstly, that geopolitical players may really be interested in the Middle Corridor passing through Armenia as an alternative or backup route to Georgia in the South Caucasus, and secondly, that if not in the short term, then at least in the medium term, the Armenian route, with its potential, could become the main route of the Middle Corridor in the South Caucasus. Therefore, here it is important to keep in mind some infrastructural features of the second important project of our topic - the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) Corridor. Based on the comparative analysis data, it can be concluded that the ITI corridor is also of great importance for Turkey, whose role may increase in the future if this corridor is extended to China. In this regard, the ITI corridor will even be able to compete with the Middle Corridor.

In the context, one can evaluate the prospect of launching the Persian Gulf-Mediterranean Sea corridor, as well as the Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor. Bearing in mind that in the meantime, Turkey may also become part of the Black and Mediterranean Sea corridor.

The new idea of a transport hub can significantly influence Turkey's foreign policy, forcing it to temporary revisions in relation to a particular country¹.

Infrastructure realities of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (the Middle Corridor)

In recent years, Turkey has been making significant efforts to become a transport hub, both in the East-West and North-South directions. First of all, we are talking about attempts to turn it into a railway hub. Turkey controls the land routes from Asia to Europe, bypassing the territory of Russia and Turkey really has a good prospect of

¹ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. "Turkey's Multilateral Transportation Policy." Accessed November 1, 2021. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa.

becoming a railway hub in both East-West and North-South directions. Moreover, these two directions may have so-called sub-directions, which we will describe in detail in the article. In our opinion, the most important direction for Turkey is the East-West direction, for which we will first start discuss this direction.

Turkey has made great efforts to become railway hub between East and West (China-EU). Its preparatory works were carried out in the last decade. In this context, two important steps have been taken in Turkey. The opening of the Marmara undersea railway in 2013 and the opening of BTK railway in 2017. At the opening of the 829 kilometer (515 miles) BTK Railway, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was announcing “Compared to other corridors, the term of cargo transportation by BTK is reduced by 35-40 days, which will be beneficial for cargo carriers. Chinese freight will be delivered to European Union countries within 12 to 15 days via the BTK railway through the Middle Corridor,” Erdoğan said. In his speech, the president of Turkey also said that currently around 240 million tons of freight is shipped from China to Europe. “Carrying even 10 percent of this amount through our countries will bring an extra 24 million tons of freight transportation,” he said².

BTK created an opportunity for the Beijing-London train route. In addition to all this, Turkey is trying to build a high-speed railway in the direction of Kars-Edirne so that trains can cross its territory much faster. High-speed trains are already running between Istanbul and Ankara, and the construction of the Ankara-Sivas section is underway, which should reduce the number of trains between them from 12 hours to 2 hours³. These steps will help to turn Turkey into an East-West railway hub, which has two main components: the Middle Transport Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route - TITR) and Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) Transport Corridor.

Turkey's these steps in the railway sector have not gone unnoticed by China; the latter started sending trains to Turkey, through Turkey to Europe. The first freight train from China to Europe arrived in Turkey in November 2019. The first Chinese freight train traveling the China Railway Express line from Xi'an, China to Europe crossed into Europe using Istanbul's Marmaray subsea tunnel, reaching the Kazlıcesme railway station in Zeytinburnu, Istanbul. The containers were transported in two parts, with 21 of them pulled by a locomotive of Turkish State Railways and the remainder by a Chinese locomotive. Infrastructure Minister Cahit Turhan said the line (BTK), has reduced cargo transportation time between China and Turkey from a month to 12 days. Turkey has become a central link in a “middle corridor”, which extends between Beijing and London as well as the “Iron Silk Road” - a rail track between Turkey and Kazakhstan, Turhan noted. Turhan said with the integration of Marmaray in the route, transportation time between the Far East and Western Europe has been reduced to 18 days. “When we consider the trade volume between Asia and Europe of \$21 trillion, its importance will be easily understood. The Iron Silk Road, which benefits approximately 5 billion people and 60 countries, has become a new and very important alternative for

² Daily Sabah. 2017. “Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway to stimulate economic growth, boost human development.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2017/10/30/baku-tbilisi-kars-railway-to-stimulate-economic-growth-boost-human-development>.

³ Anadolu Gazete. 2021. “Ankara-Sivas arası 2 saat olacak Kaynak.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.anadolugazete.com.tr/ankara/ankara-sivas-arasi-2-saat-olacak-100233h.htm>.

global trade networks,” Turhan said. The China Railway Express line is carrying an electronic product load equivalent to 42 tractors. The train is traveling over two continents, 10 countries, two seas and 11,483 kilometers (7,135 miles) of road in 12 days with 42 container-loaded wagons⁴.

In August 2020 (already) the 5th freight train coming from China through Baku-Tiflis-Kars Railway has reached the Kocaeli province of Turkey. The train has departed from China with the cooperation of Trans-Caspian International Transport Route members – ADY Container of Azerbaijan, KTZ Express of Kazakhstan, GR Logistics of Georgia and Pacific Eurasia Logistics of Turkey. According to the statement released by the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of Turkey, the freight train carried mainly electronic instruments and medical products such as masks. Four of the containers having commercial loads will be transported to Germany and Italy, said the statement. With its 50 containers, the 1056 meters-long freight train is the longest export train that has ever passed through BTK⁵.

After that Turkey also started sending trains to China on the same route. On December 4, Turkey sent its first cargo-laden freight train on its maiden journey to China from the Kazlıçeşme Station in Istanbul. The General Directorate of Turkish State Railways (TCDD) stated that the first freight train from Turkey to China was transporting refrigerators in 42 containers aboard. On its way to China, the train was sent off by the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation Adil Karaismailoğlu from Kazlıçeşme Station of Marmaray. It is due to cross Georgia and then enter the Caspian Sea transit. Turkey's outbound rail freight shipment is due to arrive in China in 12 days⁶.

Operated in collaboration with the Turkish State Railways and Pacific Eurasia, the train will pass through two continents, two seas and five countries. The 8,693-kilometer (over 5,400 miles) journey includes 2,323 kms in Turkey, 220 in Georgia, 430 in Azerbaijan, 420 in the Caspian Sea, 3,200 in Kazakhstan and 2,100 in China⁷. Thus the first train carrying goods from Turkey to China set off from Istanbul on Dec. 4, 2020, covering a distance of 8,693 kilometers across Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea, and Kazakhstan to reach China's Xian city and completed its historic trip on Dec. 19.

Turkey sent a second freight train with 42 container export cargoes to China a few days later, again in December 2020⁸, and a third freight train in January 2021. Turkey's third export of boron via railway to China will cut its transportation down from the previous 45-60 day maritime journey to just 15-20 days, the country's Energy and

⁴ Anadolu Agency. 2019. “First China Railway Express line train reaches Turkey.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/first-china-railway-express-line-train-reaches-turkey/1637811#>.

⁵ Invest in Turkey. 2020. “Freight Train Coming from China Reaches Kocaeli Province of Turkey.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/news/news-from-turkey/pages/freight-train-coming-from-china-reaches-kocaeli-province-of-turkey.aspx>.

⁶ Invest in Turkey. 2020. “First Export Freight Train to China Sets Off from Turkey.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/news/news-from-turkey/pages/first-export-freight-train-to-china-sets-off-from-turkey.aspx>.

⁷ Anadolu Agency. 2020. “First China-bound freight train arrives NW Turkey.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/first-china-bound-freight-train-arrives-nw-turkey/2067589>.

⁸ Anadolu Agency. 2020. “Second cargo train to China from Turkey reaches Kocaeli.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/second-cargo-train-to-china-from-turkey-reaches-kocaeli/2084132>.

Natural Resources Minister Fatih Donmez said Friday. Donmez, speaking at a farewell ceremony for the boron export from Ankara for its destination in Xian in China, stressed that China has become a key mining export market for Turkey with 5.8 million tons in exports to China in 2020. Despite all the difficulties in 2020, he said that Turkey managed to sustain its position as a leading global boron sector player, supplying 57% of global demand and reaching 1.73 million tons in boron sales worldwide.

Eti Maden, a company described by Donmez as a sustainable and reliable, international supplier of boron, will undertake the export of 42 containers of boron on a 754-meter-long train from Kirka in Eskisehir initially on the Ankara-Sivas-Kars route, finalizing its journey in Turkey on Feb. 2. It will continue its journey through the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway to Xian, taking around two weeks. From Turkey to China, it will cover a total distance of 7,792 kilometers, Donmez said. Eti Maden, which previously exported boron internationally by sea, is now exporting via train with “solid cooperation from TCDD,” Donmez said.

The transport involves a train journey of more than 2,300 kilometers (over 1,440 miles) in Turkey, 220 kilometers (some 135 miles) in Georgia, 430 kilometers (over 265 miles) in Azerbaijan, 420 kilometers (some 260 miles) across the Caspian Sea, 3,200 kilometers (nearly 1,990 miles) in Kazakhstan, and 2,100 kilometers (over 1,300 miles) to China⁹.

At the same time, Turkey started sending export trains to Europe. Turkey’s first-ever export freight train departed on November 13 from Medlog Station in Turkey’s northwestern Tekirdağ province carrying goods to Europe. The freight train exports goods to Bulgaria via the Tekirdağ-Muratlı railway. It consists of 27 trailers at the first stage, with up to 300 trailers slated for production. It is further aimed to reduce the jam and the setbacks at the entry points and customs with the newly-departed freight train¹⁰.

In late March 2021, an article was published on the Anadolu Agency website stating that Turkey has become a key country in the ‘Middle Corridor’ transportation route with its strategic location and the importance of the Middle Corridor was further enhanced when the ship “The Ever Given” ran aground in the Suez Canal.

Sefa Çatal, International Trade Routes and International Economic Security Specialist, told to Anadolu Agency that the Middle Corridor, which is an alternative to the ‘Northern Corridor’ (passing through Russia), and the ‘South Corridor’ (passing through Iran), has an important place for the integration of China and Europe.

The North and South corridors connecting China and the countries of the region to the Middle East and Europe are also lines that are likely to experience difficulties in terms of geopolitical positions (Russia-West confrontation and Iran-West Confrontation). Çatal stated that the Northern Corridor could be affected according to the relations between Russia, the USA and China, and that this process may result in the detriment of China, and that this country may find itself in a possible East-West polarization. Pointing out that there is a similar danger in the Southern Corridor, Çatal

⁹ Anadolu Agency. 2021. “Turkey sends off third export train of boron to China.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkey-sends-off-third-export-train-of-boron-to-china/2127101>.

¹⁰ Invest in Turkey. 2020. “Turkey’s First Export Freight Train Departs from Tekirdağ to Europe.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/news/news-from-turkey/pages/turkeys-first-export-freight-train-departs-from-tekirdag-to-europe.aspx>.

said, and “US-centered, Saudi Arabian and Israeli policies, the isolation of Iran and the conflicts in the Middle East, the continuation of the chaos environment, put the southern route of the Belt and Road Initiative at risk takes.”

Thus Çatal considers that the most trouble-free route that will carry China to Europe and the Middle East by land is the Middle Corridor, and made the following assessment: “In this corridor, there is no country that will force China and the region in terms of economic competition, military and politics. On the contrary, countries can see this as an opportunity for their own development by developing their relations with great powers such as China. Turkey is a gateway to Europe and the Balkans, as well as being the most important country in Central Asia and the Middle East to cooperate in the economic field. The fact that Turkey controls all strategic transit routes in the context of Asia-Europe put the country in a key position for the project” he said.

Çatal stated that the jamming of the ship *The Ever Given* in the Suez Canal had a negative impact on world trade and once again showed how important alternative routes are. Stating that hundreds of ships are waiting for the canal to be opened with this event, and the hourly cost of this to world trade is close to half a billion dollars, Çatal emphasized that every year, 1 percent of the losses in world trade are due to logistics delays and these losses amount to billions of dollars¹¹.

Another article was published on the Anadolu website in May 2021 mentioned first of all, transporting Chinese goods to Europe via the Central Corridor is easier and more advantageous compared to the Northern Corridor passing through Russia. Goods transported via the Trans-Siberian route reach Europe in 20 days, while goods transported from the Central Corridor can reach the same point in 12 days. In addition, the fact that the roads and railways in the Northern Corridor are not up to modern standards, while the roads and railways of the Middle Corridor countries are of higher standards, make the Middle Corridor more strategic and profitable than the Northern Corridor. In addition, the Middle Corridor offers China new opportunities in terms of reducing its dependence on Russia in terms of transportation. Finally, the fact that European countries have problems in their relations with Russia, especially Russia’s serious security problems with its Western neighbors, makes the credibility of the Northern Corridor questionable.

Secondly, the Middle Corridor also has many advantages over the Southern Corridor, which runs through Iran. Goods sent from China to Europe via the Southern Corridor reach their destination in 14 days, while goods sent from the Central Corridor arrive at the same destination in 12 days. As in the Northern Corridor, the infrastructure problems of the Southern Corridor, the tension in US-Iranian relations, and the sanctions against Iran devalue this corridor. In addition, factors such as frequent problems at the Iran-Turkey border, delays in the shipment of goods and the existence of a terrorist problem on this route can be mentioned. On the other hand, the fact that the Middle Corridor passes through politically stable countries and that there are no security problems in the countries located on this corridor makes the Middle Corridor stand out for China compared to other corridors. Finally, the Middle Corridor has advantages over sea routes.

¹¹ Anadolu Agency. 2021. “Türkiye stratejik konumuyla ulaşım rotası 'Orta Koridor'da kilit ülke haline geldi.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/turkiye-stratejik-konumuyla-ulasim-rotasi-orta-koridorda-kilit-ulke-haline-geldi/2192372>.

For example, goods sent from China to Europe by sea can reach their destination in 36 days¹².

It is obvious that Turkey wants to launch and develop the Middle Transport Corridor, which, in addition to trade between China and Europe, has at least two important components.

1) Turkey and China will trade with each other on this route. In the last 5 years, their trade turnover amounted to \$ 126 billion¹³. China had \$18.1 billion exports and \$3.7 billion imports in its trade with Turkey in 2017. In the first nine months of 2018, China exported \$16.6 billion (a huge quantity of products went to Europe via Turkey) and imported just \$2.2 billion from Turkey. China has become Turkey's second largest trading partner and the largest source of imports (Isik and Zou 2019, 1-16).

2) Turkey and the Turkic countries of Central Asia (including Azerbaijan) will trade on this route. Their annual trade volume is \$ 21 billion. At the same time, Turkey plans to significantly increase trade with both China and the Turkish world¹⁴.

Turkey realizes that the serious operation of the Middle Transport Corridor will bring significant revenues, promote Turkey in the top ten most economically developed countries, strengthen its transit role, turn the country into a railway hub, make China and Europe dependent on Turkey. It may even have some impact on Turkey's EU membership.

The above shows that the Middle Transport Corridor is a very important for Turkey, which currently wants to direct a part of the huge trade between China and Europe (\$ 600-700 billion a year) to the Middle Corridor, trying to convince both sides that the Middle Corridor is the fastest and safest route compared to other land routes and also sea's route. Turkey will make every effort to make the Middle Corridor operational at full capacity as soon as possible. It is obvious that the Middle Corridor will significantly increase the regional and global importance of the Caspian Sea intensifying the struggle for the largest lake in the world. But insufficient capacity of Caspian ports may be problematic for Turkey, China and Europe.

East–west from the PRC to Europe, the crossing of the Caspian Sea is a major bottleneck as ferry and port services are insufficient to balance rail throughput capacity on either side (Badambaeva and Ussembay 2018). The rail ferry to Baku has been operational for more than three decades, but it only introduced container services in 2019 (PortsEurope 2019). The roll-on–roll-off (RoRo) vessel fleet has expanded in recent years, and there are now 13 servicing the Baku–Aktau and Baku-Turkmenbashi routes (Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Company (ASCO) 2019). Azerbaijan has built a new port in Alat, with a first-phase capacity of 10-11.5 million tonnes of general cargo and 40,000-50,000 TEU containers, with plans for further expansion (Kenderdine and Bucszy 2021).

¹² Anadolu Agency. 2021. “Zengezur koridoru, Pekin-Londra hattı ve Türkiye'nin artan önemi.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/zengezur-koridoru-pekini-londra-hatti-ve-turkiye-nin-artan-onemi/2254505>.

¹³ TRT Haber. 2020. “Türkiye ile Çin arasında 126 milyar dolarlık ticaret.” Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/ekonomi/turkiye-ile-cin-arasinda-126-milyar-dolarlik-ticaret-463913.html>.

¹⁴ Hürriyet. 2021. “‘Türk Keneşi'nin İstanbul çıkarması.” Accessed November 23, 2021. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turk-kenesinin-istanbul-cikarmasi-41938260>.

There are still problems in Turkey's railway infrastructure that need to be solved: construction of high-speed lines (HSL), congestion of the Ankara-Istanbul section and the need to bypass it, crossing of the Asian and European sections of Istanbul (by rail and/or ferry), etc. Thus, Turkey still has serious homework. It is gratifying for Turkey that the EU also attaches great importance to increasing trade with Asia. Europe can be connected not only with China, but also with the countries of Central Asia through the Middle Corridor.

In 2018, the EU published a new policy on Europe-Asia connectivity, with rail transport a central element (European Commission 2018). The EU has invested heavily in regional connectivity: between 2014 and 2020, it allocated €1.1 billion to the Central Asian Development Cooperation Instrument. The European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have also invested €11.3 billion in the region, an amount orders of magnitude higher than Chinese regional infrastructure investment (Russell 2019). Container traffic between Europe and each of the Middle Corridor countries by rail, though, is currently negligible (Russell 2019).

Importance of the subroutes of the Middle Corridor

In addition, due to the Middle Corridor, Turkey has the opportunity to become a railway junction not only in the East-West, but also in the East-South and West-North directions. The first shipment by BTK (600 tons of Kazakh wheat) was sent not to the European part of Turkey and to Europe, but to south – to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Mersin. Thus, Turkey implemented its concept of Three seas, when the three countries connected by BTK (Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan) thus connected the three seas (Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caspian Sea). Thus Turkey offers China to carry out railway trade with its territory with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Turkey wants to become a window to the Mediterranean Sea for China.

In the last two years, Turkey has started sending freight trains not only to China, but also to Russia by BTK. By this, Turkey shows that it is ready to become a railway hub in the given West-North, North-South directions, when the same countries of the Middle East and North Africa can carry rail freight to Russia through Turkey (and in the opposite).

On January 29, 2020 two freight trains left Ankara Railway Station for Russia and China. Both passed through the BTK. Freight trains carrying exports to Russia and China departed from Turkey's capital Ankara. Though trains had traveled this route to China before, this is the first time that exports are being hauled from Turkey to Russia via rail, Turkish Transport and Infrastructure Minister Adil Karaismailoglu stressed during an event at the train station. The train en route to Russia is carrying major appliances on 15 wagons and 15 containers for the 4,650-kilometer (2,889 miles) distance, Karaismailoglu said¹⁵.

¹⁵ Anadolu Agency. 2021. "Export trains depart from Turkey to China, Russia." Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/export-trains-depart-from-turkey-to-china-russia/2127393>.

The Middle Corridor and Armenia's Perspective

The Second Artsakh War opened new opportunities for Turkey to develop the Middle Corridor (our approach to the word “corridor” is such that each country should control the transport corridors (communications) passing through its territory).

1) Turkey can tell China and Europe that the situation in the region after the war is not as explosive as before, that this is already a stable and peaceful region, that it is worth carrying out cargo transportation by this region. It is true that some border lethal incidents between Armenia and Azerbaijan were registered in the year following the war, but in our opinion they have a time limit. The closer the deadline for the opening of communications in the region (end of preparatory work), the more Turkey will limit Azerbaijan to make such incidents, as they jeopardize the thesis of Turkey to carry out railway cargo in the scope of Middle Corridor through the “safe Caucasus region”.

2) The Middle Corridor passing through the South Caucasus may have not only a Georgian branch, but also an Armenian branch. The Armenian branch can become an alternative and backup option to the Georgian route. The Turkish side considers this a serious advantage, emphasizing that the incident on the Suez Canal showed how important it is to have an alternative, to be insured against risks. By the way, the Armenian branch has the potential to become a main route of Middle Corridor in the South Caucasus, depending on the regional developments.

3) If the Middle Corridor passes through Armenia, it can have at least two directions: southern (so-called Zangezur Corridor) and northern (Ijevan Corridor). If a direct railway from Vanadzor (Gyumri) to Ijevan is built in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, if the Gyumri-Kars and Ijevan-Aghstafa railways are restored, then this northern route will be the shortest route between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

All this proves that Turkey may really be interested in passing the Middle Corridor through Armenia despite the fact that it puts it in transit dependence on Armenia (or increases the existing transit dependence on Armenia). Russia-Georgia relations in this context have a significant impact on Turkey's position. Turkish experts fear that over time, there may be aggravations in them (as in the case of August 2008), which will jeopardize large-scale cargo transportation and the expediency of the route. In Turkey, they also take into account that in case of a Russian-Georgian confrontation, they do not have a serious influence to intervene, to prevent the escalation. That's why Turkey definitely wants Georgia to participate in the so-called 3+3 regional platform (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Iran Turkey).

Meanwhile, the situation is very different in the case of the Armenian route, as in this case one of the possible conflicting parties is Azerbaijan, on which Turkey has a great influence. The Middle corridor is currently Armenia's biggest card against Turkey, Turkey is quite dependent on Armenia in this context, despite the existence of a Georgian route (Saakashvili's return to Georgia may have increased Turkey's fears about Georgia's future). Turkey is in a hurry to launch the Middle Transport Corridor, as each lost day is a huge amount of money. On the other hand carrying out cargo transportation along the Syunik- Nakhchivan (southern) route allows Turkey not to change the status quo, not to open the border with Armenia, but at the same time to get Nakhchivan out of regional isolation. In the case of the northern route (Ijevan-Gyumri) Turkey will have to

open the border with Armenia. However, Turkey may prefer not to build railway from Kars to Nakhchivan, instead use almost complete Nakhchivan-Yeraskh-Gyumri-Kars railway.

Having need of Armenia in the context of the Middle corridor, Turkey can moderate its demands, set aside the two preconditions presented to Armenia (renunciation of the efforts for the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide and recognition of the Kars Treaty). Almost all the superpowers have recognized the Armenian Genocide, Turkey, in fact, has not suffered seriously from all that and its fears have diminished. Turkey also does not seriously suffer from the fact that Armenia does not recognize the current border of Turkey.

This means that from Turkey's point of view, these are such topics that it can, if not completely abandon those preconditions, then at least put them aside for the sake of launching the Middle Corridor through Armenia. If he continues to come up with preconditions, it will only complicate and delay the issue of launching a Middle Corridor through Armenia as well.

As for the allegations of calling that corridor a pan-Turkic corridor, in our opinion, those who insist on that point of view should accept that at present there are already two pan-Turkic corridors, both of which bypass the territory of Armenia. One of them passes through Georgia. The same BTK should be considered as a pan-Turkic corridor from the point of view of those who claim that point of view, as it turns out that Georgia connects Turkey and Azerbaijan, and in a broader sense, Turkey and the Turkic world. The second pan-Turkic corridor passes through Iran, which, like Georgia, connects Turkey and Azerbaijan, and in a broader sense, Turkey and the Turkic world.

As for Russia's position on crossing the Middle corridor through Armenia, in our opinion, Russia is interested in isolating Georgia from regional projects. Besides, it is in Russia's interest for these cargo transportation to be carried out through the territory of Armenia, as in that case the given process will be somewhat controllable compared to the Georgian route. By opening the Armenian branch of the Middle Corridor, Russia will be able to establish a railway connection with Turkey through the territory of Armenia, bypassing the territory of Georgia. All this may mean that the interests of Turkey and Russia coincide in the issue of passing the Middle Transport Corridor through the territory of Armenia as well.

Thus, Armenia has the potential to become a transport corridor not only in the North-South (Persian Gulf-Black Sea), but also in the East-West directions. We lost the first chance after the First Artsakh war, and the Second Artsakh war gives Armenia the second and maybe the last chance in this context. The implementation of these transport corridors will provide Armenia with large transit revenues, will grow Armenia's geopolitical importance, will increase the interest of China, EU and other superpowers in Armenia, will create interdependence between regional countries, which can reduce the likelihood of war.

However, interdependencies also produce mutual vulnerabilities, hence possible conflict, since interdependence is usually asymmetrical and some actors are more vulnerable to pressure (asymmetrical interdependence can be a source of power, links the liberal stress on interdependence with the realist focus on power (Keohane and Nye 2012).

Development of Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) Corridor

On October the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Road Transport Corridor Project successfully carried commercial cargo on Pakistani trucks to Turkey. The trucks departed Sept. 27 from Karachi and reached the Turkish metropolitan city of Istanbul on October 7, covering 5,300 kilometers (3,293 miles). Pakistan's envoy to Turkey, senior Iranian officials, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), International Road Union (IRU), Turkey's Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) and other participants representing the public and private sector attended the ceremony in Istanbul. The Project was launched by Turkey's Trade Ministry and counterparts in Iran and Pakistan under the aegis of ECO. The decision to establish the road transport corridor was made at the 8th Meeting of ECO Ministers of Transport and Communications in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in 2011.

"I would only like to say there is a saying in almost every language, in our language, Urdu, also, that drops, when they are taken together become a river," Pakistan's ambassador to Turkey said at the event. These are the first drops that will become a river of commerce between and among Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, and bring all three people together, said Syrus Sajjad Qazi. Asli Calik, head of department, transport and logistical systems at TOBB, said: "It is an extremely important corridor for the development of our road trade with the Middle East and regional countries." Calik said that thanks to the project, Pakistan is now more integrated into international trade and also Turkey's exports to China will be able to be developed through Pakistan on the route. Shaukat Abbas, General Manager Marketing at National Logistics Cell (NLC), said the project would enhance the relationship between all three countries. Javed Hedayati, General Director at Iran Transport Ministry, also emphasized Iran's full commitment to supporting the project, adding "it's a good sample for doing with other neighbors and regional collaboration."¹⁶

IRU Secretary General Umberto de Pretto has greeted the successful arrival of two trucks in Istanbul, launching TIR along the important new ITI trade corridor. The trucks, operated by Pakistan Company NLC and carrying textiles and tyres for export, have demonstrated transit time savings of 80% on the normal maritime route. IRU Secretary General Umberto de Pretto said, "This new ITI corridor is a clear demonstration of how TIR saves time and money, bringing greater trade and economic benefits to this region. The ECO region has always been a pioneer in using the TIR system."

ECO Secretary General Khosrav Noziri said, "The successful activation of the ITI corridor is thanks to close cooperation between ECO and IRU, as well as all public and private stakeholders in the Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. It will definitely help boost regional integration and connectivity."

With the traditional sea route taking 25 to 40 days, the transport has successfully demonstrated huge time-savings. TIR transports can now reach Istanbul from Pakistan in as little as six days, with highly secure and speedy border crossings, reducing risk as well as costs and time. With the significant trade potential of the ECO region, this new

¹⁶ Anadolu Agency. 2021. "Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Road Transport Corridor begins operation." Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/islamabad-tehran-istanbul-road-transport-corridor-begins-operation/2387089>.

corridor will enhance connectivity and sets a milestone for transit facilitation, enabling further regional integration and more efficient access to global markets¹⁷.

Thus, the ITI corridor, like the Middle Corridor, is designed to demonstrate the advantages of land routes (highways, railways) and thus profitability over the sea route, especially after the well-known crisis in the Suez Canal. Due the ITI corridor Turkey can act as a bridge between Pakistan and the EU (the EU is Pakistan's second largest trading partner, Pakistan is the EU's 42nd largest trading partner). Pakistan, in turn, can act as a link for Turkey in its trade with China. It could also have a railway component if the Karakorum (Khunjerab) railway is built between Pakistan and China (China-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey Corridor - CPITC).

China-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey International Transport Corridor, which starts in China and ends in Turkey, is an envisaged international strategic channel linking Asia and Europe. Specifically, it is an important corridor which has been grounded, as a concept, in the BRI. The construction of the China-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey International Corridor has internal driving forces and important strategic value. The channel is based on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, expanded to Iran and Turkey, and can be built for a new Asia-Europe continental bridge. As an important skeleton of the Silk Road Economic Belt, this channel not only connects the Yangtze River Economic Belt with the new land and sea corridor in the south but also efficiently interconnects with Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe externally, so it is a strategic importance for promoting and implementing infrastructure connectivity in the Belt and Road Initiative. At present, China has established strategic (friendly) relationships with Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran, respectively. It is remarkable that, on March 27, 2021, China's foreign minister Wang Yi signed a comprehensive partnership agreement with Iran's foreign minister, Zariff for a period of 25 years, with contents including political, strategic, and economic aspects. The transportation infrastructure is connected on a certain basis among the four countries. At present, with the further progress of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Pakistan's infrastructure and transport network are being modernized by leaps and bounds. The ITI railway connecting Istanbul, Teheran, Islamabad, will be resumed after 10-year breakup (mostly by security concerns and poor technique) and will intensify the trade contacts among the three countries to a great extent. The four countries are closely related at the political, economic, and Geo-level, and there are a wide range of interests among them (Xiaoxiang and Chengfeng 2021, 1-14).

At present, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan are also trying to launch the ITI railway version, which is 6543 km long, of which 1990 km is in Pakistan, 2603 km in Iran and 1950 km in Turkey. The railway corridor was put into operation in 2009, but at that time, after several pilot trips, it did not become a regular route (trains were completely stopped in December 2011). The railway line has great potential. Initially, it took a train 15 days to make the 6500km journey, and this was eventually reduced to 11.5 days. The train can carry 20, 40ft rail cars. The route has been recognized as an international corridor by the United Nations.

¹⁷ IRU. 2021. "TIR slashes 80% off transit time with new Pakistan-Iran-Turkey corridor." Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.iru.org/news-resources/newsroom/tir-slashes-80-transit-time-new-pakistan-iran-turkey-corridor>.

It is foreseen that the railway not only connects these three countries but also forms a link between Europe and Asia. From Istanbul, there are good connections to Europe and with the use of the Marmara undersea railway tunnel; the delivery could be even faster. On the other end, India and Bangladesh have expressed interest to connect to the line, in order to realize a faster transport link to the Middle East and Europe. The ITI train is also called the Eco Container Train¹⁸.

In February 2020 the railways of Turkey (TCDD), Iran (RAI) and Pakistan have agreed to resume and launch the operation of the container train running between ITI as soon as possible. The operation of this container train comes under the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

At the transport committee meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC) of ECO held at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran in January 2020, the Council noted that all necessary preparations for dispatching the ITI Container train including agreement on unified tariffs and the timetables of the train in each country have already been fulfilled, and recommended that the the ITI Container Train be dispatched as soon as possible.

The railway cargo of this train is scheduled to be transported from Turkey to Europe and the container train is to use the Marmara undersea railway tunnel in the near future. In March 2021, the media reported the imminent revival of the ITI railway version under the auspices of the ECO¹⁹.

The revival of the ITI corridor between Turkey, Iran and Pakistan has been long-awaited. Operations were about to begin a couple of weeks ago, with the train departing from Istanbul on 4 March and arriving at Islamabad on 16 March. However, to everyone's disappointment, this departure never took place. The service got postponed one more time, literally at the last minute, and many questions arise around its actual feasibility.

Even the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, reassured the media at the beginning of March that the train would run and evolve to a precious link between the West and the East. In fact, everything was ready for the ITI's train trip, with all the administrative, operational and security arrangements being in place.

However, at a meeting between the three countries' authorities on 2 March, the Pakistan Rail Freight and Transportation Company cancelled the service, citing safety-related concerns. It seems that the main reason behind the ITI train's cancellation is the concern of Pakistan authorities regarding the weight of cargo and the type of wagons used. The Turkish authorities arranged the train to run on eight-wheel wagons that would carry containers weighing forty tonnes each.

Pakistan disagreed with this approach and insisted on using four-wheel wagons and 20-tonnes containers. Pakistani officials seemed to justify this decision based on malfunctioning railway line parts in the Pakistan part of the route. Surprisingly enough, this observation took place two days before the train's departure, even though rail tracks

¹⁸ GVS. 2020. "Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) train to resume operations soon." Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/iti-train/>.

¹⁹ UIC. 2020. "Iran: Launching the Istanbul-Tehran- Islamabad (ITI) container train." Accessed November 1, 2021. https://uic.org/com/enews/nr/677/article/iran-launching-the-istanbul-tehran-islamabad-iti-container-train?page=modal_enevs.

in Pakistan were considered to be probably the most significant hurdle for ITI's re-opening²⁰.

In our opinion, the construction of the "Kars-Igdir-Nakhchivan" (KIN) railway can be useful for Turkey in the development of ITI as well, as Turkey will have the opportunity to enter Pakistan through KIN railway. The Ankara-Tehran railway is not very efficient at present, as it passes over Lake Van (there are ferries in the direction of Van-Datvan). We do not rule out that the Turkish side, in addition to the Kars-Igdir-Nakhchivan railway, will build the Gyurbulak (border checkpoint with Iran in the Ararat region)-Horasan (between Kars and Erzurum) railway. Such a railway was built and operated during Tsarist Russia, but at present it does not exist²¹. The construction of the Kars-Igdir-Nakhchivan or Horasan-Agri-Igdir-Nakhchivan and Gyurbulak-Horasan railways will be important not only for the development of ITI, but also because of these railways Turkey will have the opportunity to become a part of Persian Gulf - Black Sea and Persian Gulf - Mediterranean Sea transport corridors.

From the Persian Gulf to Mediterranean and Black Seas

Even today, without the construction of the KIN and Gyurbulak-Horasan railways, Turkey can pretend to be part of the Persian Gulf-Black Sea transport corridor. Turkey intends to build the Erzincan-Trabzon railway, through which cargo can be transported to the Black Sea. However, this direction is not a priority for Turkey yet, the Turkish side is not taking serious steps in this context yet (not only Armenia but also Azerbaijan is considered a competitor for Turkey in the context of Persian Gulf-Black Sea transport corridor), as it has given priority to other directions, which are more realistic at the moment.

At this stage, Turkey has started the struggle to become part of the Persian Gulf-Mediterranean Sea transport corridor. Thus Turkey wants to increase the role of its Mediterranean ports, especially Mersin, which is the largest in terms of cargo transportation capacity in the country.

On November 1, 2021, the Turkish press reported that the recent "container crisis" in the world, problems in the field of shipping have opened new opportunities for Turkey. Against this background, Turkey has signed "cargo" agreements with Pakistan and the UAE, which are of key importance for it. The new agreement with the UAE stipulates that cargo will be sent from the UAE port of Sharjah to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas in the Persian Gulf, from where they will reach the Turkish-Iranian border at the Gyurbulak checkpoint, then Iskenderun to Mersin via the Mediterranean Sea (in the last 5 years, the trade turnover between Turkey and the UAE amounted to \$9.5 billion). Thus, an alternative route to Sharjah-Mersin will be created, in which case the cargo transportation period will be 6-8 days. Meanwhile, if the cargo from Sharjah is sent to

²⁰ Rail Freight. 2021. "What happened to the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad train?." Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.railfreight.com/railfreight/2021/03/17/what-happened-to-the-istanbul-tehran-islamabad-train/>.

²¹ SERKA. 2021. "Horasan-Ağrı-Gürbulak – Nahçıvan/İran demiryolu için ilk imzalar atıldı." Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.serka.gov.tr/haberler/horasan-agri-gurbulak-nahcivan-iran-demiryolu-icin-ilk-imzalar-atildi>.

Mersin by sea via the Suez Canal, it will take 20 days. Shipping cargo from Pakistan to Mersin takes 1 month by sea and 10-12 days by road²².

On November 12, the Iranian press wrote that UAE, Turkey launch land transit corridor crossing Iran. The shipment (from UAE) was transported to Bazargan crossing at the border with Turkey in northwest Iran and arrived at its destination (Mersin) in eight days. As reported, prior to the inauguration of the new transit route, the previous route had to cross the Bab al-Mandeb strait, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal, and all the way to Turkey which used to take over 20 days.

Iran is one of the countries that has a special status in trade and transit relations due to its strategic location and special geography, as the country is the passage of several important international corridors. Iran communicates with 15 countries through land and water borders, and at the same time it can act as a bridge between these countries (with each other and other parts of the world). These countries have a large population and high income which can be effective as a factor in the development of transit and trade in the region²³.

On 24 November Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan visited to Turkey, which marked the beginning of a new era in Turkey-UAE relations. Turkey and the United Arab Emirates signed accords for billions of dollars of investments, including in technology and energy, after talks between President Tayyip Erdogan and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. Sheikh Mohammed's visit to Ankara, the first in years, comes as the two countries work to mend frayed ties and amid a currency crisis in Turkey.

The memorandums of understanding were signed between the Abu Dhabi Development Holding (ADQ), Turkish Wealth Fund (TVF), and the Turkish Presidency Investment Office, as well as with some Turkish companies. The UAE also said it was establishing a \$10bn fund to support strategic investments in Turkey's health and energy fields. ADQ signed an accord on investing in Turkish technology firms and on establishing a technology-oriented fund, while Abu Dhabi Ports also signed an agreement on port and logistics cooperation.

The agreements highlight the countries' pivot towards partnership after a battle for regional influence since the Arab uprisings erupted a decade ago. The disputes extended to the eastern Mediterranean and Gulf, before Ankara launched a regional charm offensive last year.

Sheikh Mohammed said he had had "fruitful" talks with Erdogan on strengthening bilateral ties. "I look forward to exploring new cooperation opportunities to benefit our two nations and advance our mutual development goals," he said on Twitter²⁴.

Thus, Turkey has begun to make extensive use of Iranian territory and initiates the launch of a second transport corridor through Iran. In this way, Turkey also wants to

²² Transmedya. 2021. "BAE ile Türkiye arasında ilk karayolu nakliyesi yapıldı." Accessed November 13, 2021. <https://www.utikad.org.tr/Detay/Sektor-Haberleri/30747/bae-ile-turkiye-arasinda-ilk-karayolu-nakliyesi-yapildi>.

²³ Tehran Times. 2021. "UAE, Turkey launch land transit corridor crossing Iran." Accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/466943/UAE-Turkey-launch-land-transit-corridor-crossing-Iran>.

²⁴ Al Jazeera. 2021. "Turkey, UAE sign financial cooperation deals as ties warm." Accessed November 30, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/11/24/turkey-uae-sign-financial-cooperation-deals-as-ties-warm>.

alleviate Iran's possible dissatisfaction with Turkey's steps aimed at developing the Middle Corridor bypassing Iran. This means that Turkey will be interested in maintaining stability in Iran later.

There are no serious obstacles for the operation of the Persian Gulf - Mediterranean Sea corridor, we think that in the near future it will start operating with great force. Moreover, this project can be joined by India, which wants to go to Europe, to the Mediterranean Sea, but not through routes initiated by China.

New Delhi's policymakers have sought the means to prevent India from being marginalised by Beijing's drive to establish a new Eurasian economic order. With India's overland access to Central Asia blocked by Pakistan and China, Beijing's consolidation of the Silk Road Economic Belt raised the prospect of India's complete strategic isolation in Central Asia. Concurrently, New Delhi faced the possibility that the advancement of Beijing's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road would be tantamount to the maritime encirclement of India.

India has a new strategic map. A new multi-modal, India-to-Europe commercial corridor is emerging from the interlinkage of the Arabian Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean that could radically reconfigure trade patterns between the Indian Ocean Region, the Middle East and Europe. India's Arabian-Mediterranean (Arab-Med) Corridor to Europe is an emerging multi-modal, commercial corridor that could radically reconfigure trade patterns between the Indian Ocean Region, the Middle East and Europe by creating an arc of commercial connectivity spanning Eurasia's southern rim from India's Arabian Sea coast to Greece's eastern Mediterranean coast. For India, this new connectivity constitutes a strategic paradigm shift of enormous geopolitical consequence that could reshape its role in the Eurasian economic order.

The new connectivity architecture is a consequence of the 2020 diplomatic normalisation between UAE and Israel, which is giving rise to the creation of a UAE-to-Israel railway network via Saudi Arabia and Jordan with Israel's Haifa port as its Mediterranean terminal. The trans-Mediterranean maritime link from Haifa to the European mainland at the massive transshipment port in Piraeus, Greece, means Indian goods shipped to the UAE's ports will be able to reach major markets and manufacturing centres of Europe.

Freight rail service from Piraeus through the Balkans and Central Europe means that Indian goods can reach Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany - connecting India to major markets and manufacturing centres of Europe. Linking India's Arabian Sea coast to Greece's Eastern Mediterranean coast along Eurasia's southern rim, India's Arab-Med Corridor to Europe carries the potential to transform the connectivity architecture of Eurasia and India's place in the global economic order. For India, this new connectivity constitutes a paradigm shift of enormous geopolitical consequence.

The India-to-Europe Arab-Med Corridor forms an alternative trans-regional commercial transportation route to the troubled Chabahar-based International North-South Transit Corridor. Instead of Chabahar, the ports of the UAE - India's third-largest trading partner - would serve as the Indian Ocean connectivity node. From Mumbai, Indian goods shipped via this multi-modal route could arrive on the European mainland in as little as 10 days, 40 per cent faster than via the Suez Canal maritime route (Tanchum 2021a, 2021b).

Although India wants to implement the Arab-Med transport corridor project, it can also join the Persian Gulf-Mediterranean Sea transport corridor (UAE, Iran, Turkey). Turkey could provoke tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, threatening the shipment of Indian cargo from Israel to Greece (EU). Turkey, located in the heart of Eurasia, controls not only land routes connecting Europe and Asia bypassing Russian territory, but also wants to control sea routes connecting Europe and Asia bypassing Russian territory (like the Ottoman Empire). In this context, Turkey has promoted the Doctrine of the Blue Homeland, which provides for the expansion of Turkey's maritime waters, including in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Blue Homeland map drawn by Admiral Cihat Yaycı includes an area of 462 thousand square kilometers (of which 189,000 km² are in the Mediterranean Sea). In 2003, a map of maritime jurisdiction prepared by the University of Seville calculated the territory of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean as 41 thousand square kilometers. According to Turkish calculations, Greece's coast length in the Eastern Mediterranean is 167 kilometers, on the other hand, Turkey's coastline is 1870 kilometers (Kadan 2020/2021).

The result can be that cargo from India can also be sent by sea to Sharjah, or immediately to Bandar Abbas, and from there to Bazargan, Mersin and Iskenderun. Other Asian countries may also join the Persian Gulf-Mediterranean Sea transport corridor in the future. We do not rule out the possibility of the version, when cargo from Sharjah and Bandar Abbas may be sent to Bazargan, from where it will be sent not only to the Mediterranean Sea, but also to the Black Sea.

Conclusion and discussion

Thus, Turkey is in a serious search for transport corridors, which will sharply increase its geopolitical role and provide large transit revenues. Until recently, Turkey was mainly interested in becoming a transport (railway) hub in the "East-West" direction, which includes the Middle Corridor and ITI corridor.

The current steps taken by Turkey with the UAE and Russia show that Turkey is also taking steps to become a transport corridor in the "North-South" direction. At this stage, Turkey has started the creation of the "Persian Gulf - Mediterranean Sea" corridor, which should not only bypass the Suez Canal, but also the countries of the Arabian Peninsula.

It is beneficial for Turkey that the situation in Syria and Iraq will remain tense and / or uncertain for some time, that the Persian Gulf-Mediterranean Sea corridor does not pass through the shortest route through Iraq and Syria, and that Turkey is not left out of the game (a decade ago, Turkey began to escalate the situation in those countries and was able to thwart the implementation of the "Iran-Iraq-Syria-Lebanon" gas pipeline project, which is also called "Shiite gas pipeline"). Turkey's "corridors" plans are a big blow to Egypt, as they are aimed at reducing the role of the Suez Canal in world trade.

In our opinion, a new era may really begin in Turkish-Iranian relations, in which Turkey will be interested in maintaining Iran's internal stability (and Iran in maintaining Turkey's internal stability). The reason is the prospect of launching and developing two transport corridors covering the territory of Iran, which is supported by Turkey. By

giving the green light to the Persian Gulf-Mediterranean Sea and ITI corridors, Turkey is giving some compensation to Iran for trying to persuade China and Europe to make greater use of the Middle Corridor, which bypasses Iran. The launch of the ITI and the Persian Gulf-Mediterranean Sea transport corridors will increase the mutual need for Turkey and Iran, increase the interdependence between Turkey and Iran, and the parties will be interested in maintaining internal stability in both countries (however, this doesn't mean that Turkey-Iran relations will be peaceful).

Thus, in the current decade, Turkey can become a major railway hub in both East-West, North-South directions and in their separate branches (east-south, west-north, etc.). Turkey has also the potential to develop the Black Sea-Mediterranean Sea Corridor. This will be facilitated by the imminent completion of the construction of the 600-kilometer "Black Sea-Mediterranean Sea" highway, due which overcoming of the distance among the two seas will be 6 hours²⁵. In addition, the two seas will be connected by high-speed rail (Mersin - Samsun)²⁶.

In order to achieve the implementation of all transport corridors, it is necessary to maintain stability not only in Turkey, but also in the countries and regions through which the above-mentioned transport corridors are to pass. We believe that Turkey has a good prospect of becoming not only a major railway, but also a major gas hub (even the largest in the world). Turkey will make every effort to achieve these two goals simultaneously, due which it will really become the New Turkey.

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²⁵ A Haber. 2021. "Karadeniz-Akdeniz yolu son durum 2021 | Sultan 2. Abdülhamid'in rüya projesi hayata geçiyor." Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.ahaber.com.tr/galeri/yasam/karadeniz-akdeniz-yolu-son-durum-2021-sultan-2-abdulhamidin-ruya-projesi-hayata-geciyor>.

²⁶ Dünya. 2018. "Akdeniz ve Karadeniz demiryoluyla bağlanıyor." Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.dunya.com/ekonomi/akdeniz-ve-karadeniz-demiryoluyla-baglaniyor-haberi-400494>.

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