



**“İQTİSADI İSLAHATLAR”
elmi-analitik jurnal**

**INFLUENCE OF
THE BAKU-TBILISI-KARS
RAILWAY CORRIDOR TO
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
SOUTH CAUCASIAN
REGION**



№ 4 (5)-2022

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SUMMARY

The article examines the current condition of Georgia's transport infrastructure, the impact of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway on the economic and political situation in Georgia, as well as the impact on the economic relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia. It was found that the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway will strengthen Georgia's geopolitical position in the region and turn this country into one of the main transport hubs in Europe, further increasing its transit potential. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines pass through these countries, and with the launch of the TANAP project, Georgia's transit importance will increase. As well as, it was found that the BTK road will help Georgia cope with the situation in Javakheti, where ethnic Armenians live and where there are a number of economic problems. Moreover, oil and gas pipelines through Georgia, seaports on the Black Sea coast, a well-developed rail system and airports will play an increasingly important role in connecting East and West.

Keywords: *Georgia, transport, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, integration, Azerbaijan*

INTRODUCTION

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century is characterized by fundamental changes in international relations. One of the areas directly affected by these changes is the South Caucasus sub-region. The countries of the region that gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union did not hesitate to choose the path of European integration in defining their political and economic orientation. However, unresolved conflicts in the region, serious security threats and the Russian factor had some influence on the process of European integration, and this is still observed today.

The South Caucasus region is attractive for Europe not only for its geopolitical, but also for its important geo-economic importance. As we know, the region with its rich hydrocarbon resources has always been the focus of attention of the world's energy centers. The countries of the region were also interested in building up and expanding energy cooperation. Thus, it became clear that the economic development of the region as a whole depends on the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian basin.

It is estimated that the oil and gas potential of the Caspian Sea is between 50 and 200 billion barrels of oil and condensate. After the collapse of the USSR, the significance of the South Caucasus region in the world economic system became clearer. It is clear that the South Caucasus region with its high energy potential is not only a passive consumer, but also makes a significant contribution to the world economy.

Since the geo-economic role of the region is largely determined by its energy potential, the economic projects being implemented here cover, respectively, the energy sector. First of all, a stable and safe supply of energy resources from the Caspian basin to the European market is the



goal of current economic projects. At the present stage, Europe considers the implementation of these projects as a key condition for ensuring its energy security. Located almost in the center of Eurasia, the South Caucasus region offers unique transport and communication opportunities to deliver energy to Europe.

Transport communications in the region play a unifying role in the North-South and West-East directions. Europe also clearly understands that having control over the South Caucasus, unique transport and communication opportunities can be achieved. Expansion of cooperation with the countries of the region in the field of energy, transport and communications plays an additional stimulating role in the process of their integration into European structures. In this regard, it should be noted that economic cooperation makes political dialogues more effective.

GEORGIAN RAILWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Georgia is a small mountainous country located in the western part of the South Caucasus. Its favorable geographical location and natural resources attract the attention of foreign states and traders. It is one of the most important countries on the Silk Road route from the 2nd century to the present.

Over the past decade, the Georgian economy has grown steadily with an average annual rate of 4.5 percent. And this despite numerous shocks, including the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, the conflict with the Russian Federation in 2008 and the fall in commodity prices since 2014, which affected key trading partners (Worldbank.org 2023).

In 2022 and 2023, economic growth in Georgia decreased from 7% to 6%. GDP per capita was 4931.82 US dollars in 2021., unemployment was 3.9% in 2021 (Img.org, 2021).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus became a region of conflict and competition on the international political agenda. Political divisions between the two countries prevented regional prosperity through economic cooperation. In this unstable context, the political, social, economic and commercial ties between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey led to the creation of an exemplary mechanism for economic and political cooperation (Celikpala M. and Veliyev J. 2015).

Turkey and Azerbaijan began to play a key role in the economic development of Georgia. In the 1990s, the economic and social situation in the country began to deteriorate sharply (Gadzhiev. K.S. 2003).

The development and strengthening of energy cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey (AGT) during the 1990s and 2000s marked the beginning of trilateral cooperation, which has since grown into a strategic partnership in various fields between the three countries (Garibov A. 2018).

In the years after independence, ethnic conflicts in the country and civil war further exacerbated the difficult economic situation. Georgia began to emerge from this difficult economic and political situation and began to gain momentum thanks to significant energy and transport projects in the region. Thanks to these projects, Georgia currently has close economic ties with Azerbaijan and Turkey (Vardomsky L.B., Pylin A.G., Sokolova T.V. 2014).

18% of the country is controlled by separatist regimes illegally. This, in turn, impedes the development of the country's economy. Georgia's nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (\$ billion 18.7) is about 44 times lower than in Turkey (\$ billion 720.0) and 2.8 times lower than in Azerbaijan (45.5 US dollars) (Doing business in Georgia 2021). However, according to the World Bank's research, Georgia is in the 8th place in the world in terms of comfortable business regulation (Doingbusiness.org 2021).

In Georgia, all types of transport modes are operating, except of river transportation. These types of transport have begun to develop after the country's independence since 1990. With the support of Azerbaijan and Turkey, the transport infrastructure in Georgia has been upgraded and these works is being continued (Georgia transport sector assessment, strategy, and road map 2014).

At the present, there are more than 1.2 million vehicles in Georgia. In the first years of its independence, this figure was about 500,000. The country's access to the world ocean has affected the import of a large number of vehicles from overseas countries (Statistical Yearbook of Georgia 2023)(table 1).



Table 1. Number of vehicles in Georgia, thousand units

Years	Number of common vehicles	Of these			
		Lorries	Bus and minibuses	Special vehicles	Passenger cars
2012	831.6	78.5	51.2	29.2	627.7
2013	906.7	83.9	51.9	32.2	738.7
2014	999.1	90	52.7	35.3	821.7
2015	1081.4	96.2	53	37.5	894.7
2016	1161.2	99.5	53.4	40.7	973.6
2017	1228.1	99.8	53.5	44.2	1030.6
2018	1289	101.3	53.9	48.2	1085.6
2019	1339.3	102	54.2	52.4	1130.8
2020	1404.4	104.4	54.5	55.4	1190.1
2021	1490.2	108.7	55.6	60	1265.9

Source: Geostat.ge (2023)

In 2021 the total number of vehicles in the country exceeds 1.5 million. Of these, 1 million are passenger cars. More than 40,000 are agricultural machinery (Geostat.ge 2023).

In recent years, Azerbaijani citizens have begun to show great interest in transport vehicles from Georgia. The main reason for this is the low customs duties for these cars brought to Georgia and the lower cost of shipping by sea (Central Asia and the South Caucasus: integration processes in the heart of Eurasia 2010).

Transport infrastructure in Georgia has been modernized after independence, new railway lines, magistral roads have been built. The transit geographical position of Georgia will lead to cross of transit transport corridors in its territory, which will in turn reach to the country's road industry to world standards. Thus, Georgian roads and railways are updated, the length of the roads is increased and reached to world standards (Jean-Paul Rodrigue J.P. 2007)(table 2).

Table 2. Total length of roads and railways in Georgia, km

Years	Railways	Subway lines	Roads
2012	1418	27	18945
2013	1578	27	19380
2014	1576	27	19429
2015	1576	27	20553
2016	1576	27	20727
2017	1576	29	20741
2018	1576	29	20742
2019	1576	29	20964
2020	1576	29	21110
2021	1546	29	40044

Source: Geostat.ge (2023)



Approximately 60% of the goods being transported in Georgia are transit cargo. The main share of freight traffic is going to road transport (about 60%), as well as railway transport (about 90%) is leading in freight turnover. The reason for the high turnover rates with railway transport is due to the high volume of transit traffic in the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars and Baku-Batumi lines (Geostat.ge)(table 3).

Table 3. Total freight transportation in Georgia, thousand tonnes

Transport modes	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Railway	1414.7	11881.7	10672.5	9991.5	10 860 .6	10 909.3	12 130.8
Road	30082	30412.9	30747.4	31086	31 427.5	31 773.2	32 122.7
Water	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Air	22.4	24.3	87.5	149.1	145.4	234.4	434
Total	44247.1	42318.9	41507.4	41226	42433.5	42916.9	44687.5

Source: Geostat.ge (2023)

In 2021, 350.3 million passengers were transported by all types of transport, which is 25.1 million less than in 2020. Of these, 271 million were carried by road transport, 0.1 million by air transport, and 78.4 million were transported by railway transport (Geostat.ge 2023)(table 4).

Table 4. Total passenger transportation by types of transport in Georgia, million passengers

Transport mode	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Railway	101.7	105.3	107.9	116.5	125.7	137.7	69.8	78.4
Road	353.7	363.2	373	383.1	393.4	404	304.5	271
Water	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Air	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.1	0.1
Total	455.6	468.8	481.2	500	522.5	545.4	375.4	350.3

Source: Geostat.ge (2023)

Car transport is leading in transport modes by passenger transportation in the country. The mountainous relief of the country required more use of this type of transport. The total length of Georgian highways is about 20,741 km. 19123 km of these roads are solid-coated roads. Of these roads, 1474 km are international highways and 18,997 km are second-rate roads and roads of local importance (Geostat.ge 2023)(Fig.1).

Figure 1. Georgia's transport infrastructure map



Source: Economy.ge (2023)

The first railway line in Georgia was a road between Poti and Tbilisi and was built in 1872. Tbilisi-Baku and Batumi-Tbilisi lines operate since 1883. Following the opening of the Tbilisi-Baku railway has been formed the main direction in the transportation of cargo by Georgian railways. This is the transportation of oil and oil products from the Absheron peninsula to the Black Sea ports, and this trend continues to this day (Kuchukyildiz C. 2012).

Georgian Railway system is a crucial transport artery linking Caspian Sea and Black Sea. The total length of Georgian railways is 1992 km. The length of the main roads is 1576 km. There are 1298 railway bridges, 32 tunnels, 22 passenger stations and 114 filling stations in country. In Georgia, 100% of railways have been electrified (Railway.ge 2021).

The larger part of the railway's cargo is transit cargo, primarily oil and oil products transporting from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the Batumi Port and Kulevi Terminal (Yukleyen A. and Walsh J. 2015).

Kulevi Oil Terminal and port is one of the first and the most important investments of SOCAR in Georgia. Kulevi Oil Terminal designated for the transshipment of oil and oil products – discharge from railway tank cars and vessels, storage in the reservoirs and loading to vessels. From 2008, SOCAR provides a high level of service, and operates in compliance with international market requirements by following all rules and regulations (Socar.az 2021).

In 2021, the volume of cargo transportation by rail amounted to 12.1 mln. t. It is 1.2 million tons more than the corresponding figure for 2020. The volume of container transportation increased by 3% in 2021 to 18,000 TEU (Intracen.org 2021).

BAKU-TBILISI-KARS RAILWAY CORRIDOR

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is the joint for transportation between Europe and Asia. The project envisages the construction of numerous stations, bridges, a 4350-meter tunnel on the Turkish-Georgian border. It should be noted that the construction of a new railway line on the Kars-Akhalkalaki section as well as the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Akhalkalaki-Marabda section will be carried out in accordance with the standards of the International Railway Union (Uic.org 2021).



The total length of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line is 825.0 km; 503 km in Azerbaijan, 244.5 km in Georgia and 77.5 km in Turkey. It is expected that the maximum speed will be 120 km / h after commissioning of the entire line. It will be possible to get from Baku to Kars in just one day and two days to Istanbul. After commissioning of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, this line is supposed to carry 1 million passengers and 6.5 million tons of cargo per year, as well as 3 million passengers and 17 million tons of cargo in 2034 (Hajizade E. 2015) (table 5).

Table 5. Technical indicators of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway

N	Indicators	Parameters
1	Date of signing the contract and loan agreement	07.02.2007
2	Date of commissioning of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars	2019
3	The length of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars route	825,0 km
4	Azerbaijan	503 km
5	Georgia	244,5 km
6	Turkey	77,5 km
7	Max speed	120 km/s
8	Track gauge, Azerbaijan-Georgia / Turkey	1520 mm /1435 mm
9	Number of bridges	16
10	Forecast freight	More than 10 mln. t.
11	In the 3rd year of operation	3-5 mln. t.
12	In the 5th year of operation	6-8 mln. t.
13	In the 8th year of operation	More than 10 mln. t.

Source: Addy.gov.az (2023)

In the future, attracting European and Asian rail freight to this railway will increase the volume of container and intermodal transportation (carriage of goods by several modes of transport) in both directions. Thus, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway will serve to increase the transit potential of the countries of the region, speed up the integration process in Europe, further develop cooperation within the European Neighborhood Policy and expand our country's foreign economic relation (TRACECA Transport and Trade Atlas 2009)(Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and its ramification Influence of BTK on Georgia



Source: Author

Georgia plays the main transit country for the export of hydrocarbon resources produced in the closed Caspian Basin. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines pass through this country and the transit importance of the country increases with the launch of the TANAP project (Gasimov E.E. 2007).

Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway corridor is the second major instrument affecting the Georgian economy after the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan export pipeline. This road is of great importance for Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as for other countries involved in the TRACECA project. The BTK railway will promote the transit potential of Georgia, the acceleration of the European integration process, the further development of cooperation within the European Neighborhood Policy, and the expansion of foreign economic relations (Modebadze V. 2014).

The Eurasian transcontinental transport corridor will be of great importance in reducing the tension in the region, especially in the ethnic-political situation in Georgia. Point is that, BTK passes through Kvemo-Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions of Georgia. 45% of Azerbaijanis and 55% Armenians live in these areas respectively. The presence of such a transport corridor will lead to the improvement of the social well-being of the population living there, which will reduce the unemployment problem and will eliminate the political tensions in these areas (Bakhturidze Z. 2018).

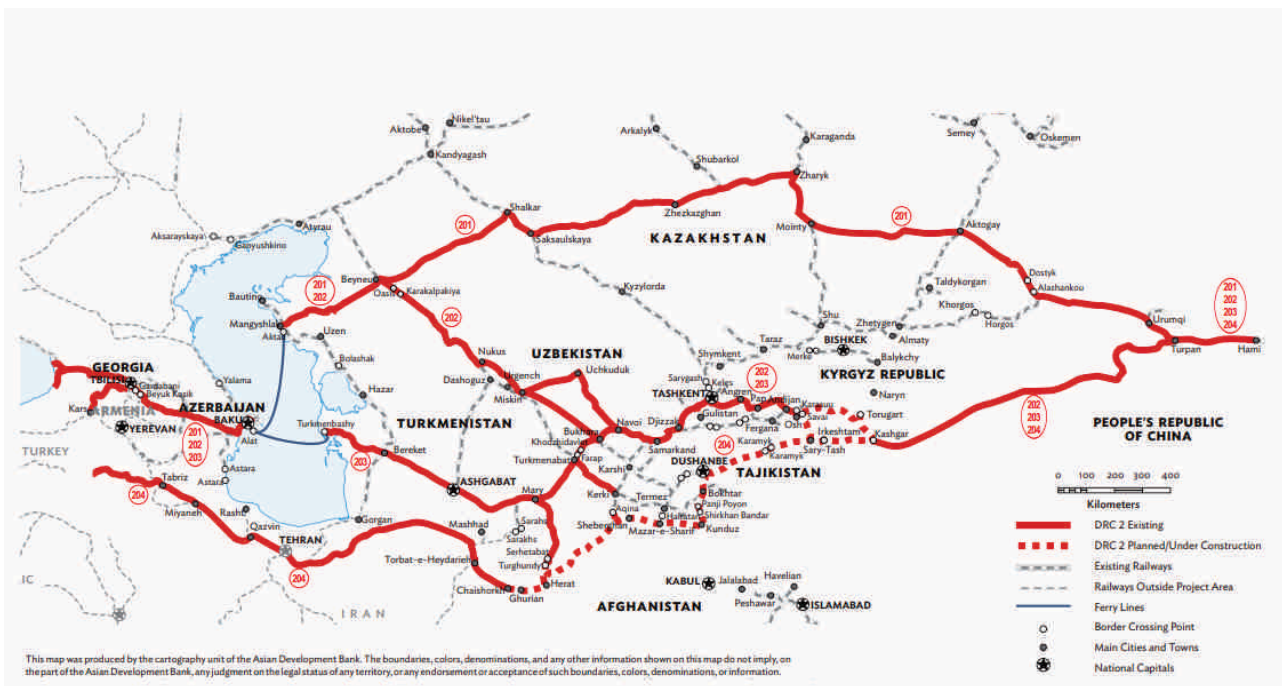
At present, the BTK line for Georgia is an important way of reaching Europe. In 2008, when the so-called regime in Abkhazia proclaimed its independence, Georgia's access to Europe via railway transport mode was blocked (Bittner A.V. and Ibrahimli M. 2018). In addition, closing of the Tbilisi-Gyumri-Kars railway has deteriorated the situation for Georgia. This situation will be

solved through BTK and Georgia will be able to connect Europe via railways transport (Samuel L. 2008).

Through this path, the Georgian tourism industry will benefit greatly. In the future, the organization of tourist tracks with this railway route will have a positive impact on the tourism potential of country and will attract a lot of tourists.

Corridor 2 provides four routes between the PRC and the Mediterranean via the Caucasus. Subcorridor 201 via Aktogay, Mointy, and Zhezkazghan is the same as the northerly route through Kazakhstan using Subcorridors 101 and 103 (para. 25) but west of Shalkar it continues to follow the TITR via Beyneu, Aktau port, Baku, and Tbilisi. Subcorridor 202 is similar except, that between Turpan (PRC) and Beyneu it follows a southerly alignment via Kashgar, Torugart (Kyrgyz Republic), Savai, Tashkent, Navoi, and Nukus (all Uzbekistan). The section between Kashgar and Savai is a missing link. Subcorridor 203 is similar to Subcorridor 202 except that between Navoi and Baku (Azerbaijan), it connects with Turkmenistan's east-west corridor to Turkmenbashi port where it crosses the Caspian Sea to Baku. (Railway Sector Assessment for Georgia, march 2 2021) (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Sections of CAREC Corridor 2 Relevant for Georgia



Source: CAREC Secretariat

Subcorridor 204 follows a more southerly route west of Kashgar and passes through Tehran (Iran) avoiding the need for transfer to Caspian Sea shipping. However, none of the sections of Subcorridor 204 within the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan have been built, and costs of construction would be very high due to mountainous terrain.

Azerbaijan, the most interesting participant of the project, allocates the most financial resources to the construction and restoration of the railway in this project. It strengthens the integration of the Caucasus countries by diversifying the export and transportation of gas, oil and oil products.

The BTK project is of both political and economic importance for Azerbaijan.



CONCLUSION

Thus, with the help Baku-Tbilisi-Kars transit corridor following strategic targets will be goaled in Georgia:

I. To improve the transport infrastructure of Georgia

The BTK railway corridor will lead to the rapid development of the country's transport infrastructure as a whole;

This will stimulate the realisation of new infrastructure projects for various types of transport. For example, the construction of the port of Anaklia, the reconstruction of roads, the construction of the Kulevi oil terminal and others.

II. To bring significant economic and social development

1. Will expand of trade relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey, other countries of Europe and Asia through BTK, create conditions for accelerate import-export operations with Turkey and Azerbaijan;

2. The creation of new jobs in the areas where the BTK railway will pass, improving the social security of the population in these places.

3. By connecting the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway corridor to the tourist trains operating in this region, it is possible to increase the number of tourists visiting Georgia and develop the country's tourism potential.

III. Further strengthening of the favorable transport and geographical position of Georgia

1. The launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway corridor will affect the transit of more cargo through the country;

2. The role of the BTK railway as an important connecting bridge between Asia and Europe will also strengthen Georgia's geopolitical position;

3. The BTK railway will also have a significant impact on increasing the country's export capacity, which will lead to an increase in transit revenues in the country and expand its opportunities to become an important center of international transit and logistics operations;

4. The increase in transit traffic through Georgia will lead to an increase in foreign investment in the country and an increase in the number of transnational companies.

IV. Increasing Georgia's reputation in the geopolitical arena

1. Resolving the difficult political and social situation in the country will have a positive impact on filling gaps in trade relations arising from the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts;

2. Opportunities for obtaining political allies are expanding due to the development of the volume of foreign investments in various sectors of the economy;

3. To develop the high transit potential of the South Caucasus and the ability to make its rich energy resources more attractive for European structures.

V. CAREC Corridor 2 (Mangystau Oblast Section) Investment Program - Tranche 2

ADB is helping Kazakhstan upgrade roads in Mangystau province and boost transit trade along a key Central Asia transport corridor.

The second project of the investment program will reconstruct an 86.7-kilometer road section between the cities of Shetpe and Zhetybay, and an 83-km section between Zhetybay and the provincial capital, Aktau.



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BAKİ-TBİLİSİ-QARS DƏMİR YOLU DƏHLİZİNİN CƏNUBİ QAFQAZ REGIONUNUN İNKİŞAFINA TƏSİRİ

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XÜLASƏ

Məqalədə Gürcüstanın nəqliyyat infrastrukturunun hazırkı vəziyyəti, Bakı-Tbilisi-Qars dəmir yolunun Gürcüstanın iqtisadi və siyasi vəziyyətinə təsiri, eləcə də Azərbaycan və Gürcüstan arasında iqtisadi münasibətlərə təsiri araşdırılır. Təyin edilib ki, Bakı-Tbilisi-Qars dəmir yolu Gürcüstanın regionda geosiyasi mövqeyini gücləndirəcək və bu ölkəni Avropanın əsas nəqliyyat qovşaqlarından birinə çevirəcək, onun tranzit potensialını daha da artıracaq. Bakı-Tbilisi-Ceyhan və Bakı-Tbilisi-Ərzurum boru kəmərləri bu ölkələrdən keçir və TANAP layihəsinin işə düşməsi ilə Gürcüstanın tranzit əhəmiyyəti artıracaq. Həmçinin müəyyən edilib ki, BTQ yolu Gürcüstana etnik ermənilərin yaşadığı və bir sıra iqtisadi problemlərin mövcud olduğu Cavaxetiyadakı vəziyyətin stabilləşdirilməsinə kömək edəcək. Bundan başqa, Gürcüstandan keçən neft və qaz kəmərləri, Qara dəniz sahilindəki dəniz limanları, yaxşı inkişaf etmiş dəmir yolu sistemi və hava limanları Şərqlə Qərbi birləşdirilməsində mühüm rol oynayacaq.

Açar sözlər: *Gürcüstan, nəqliyyat, Bakı-Tbilisi-Qars, inteqrasiya, Azərbaycan*

Məqalə redaksiyaya daxil olub: 14.12.2022

Təkrar işlənməyə göndərilib: 28.12.2022

Çapa qəbul olunub: 01.02.2023