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## **TRIPP PROJECT: GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES, GLOBAL CONFIGURATIONS,**

### **AND ALSO CULTURAL-MEDIATIC IMPACTS**

#### **Abstract**

This study explores the Zangezur Corridor as a multidimensional geopolitical, geoeconomic, and cultural phenomenon reshaping post-war dynamics in the South Caucasus. Moving beyond its function as a transit route, the corridor is analyzed as a contested space shaped by political narratives, international interests, and identity discourses. Employing an interdisciplinary framework combining geopolitics, geoconomics, media theory, and post-conflict studies, the research investigates how infrastructure becomes a symbol of power and contested meanings. Methodologically, it adopts content analysis of regional and global media, geopolitical mapping of state and non-state actors, and discourse analysis of cultural narratives. Key cases include Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the European Union. Findings reveal the corridor as a strategic pivot for Azerbaijan, challenging traditional regional powers while providing new East-West connectivity. Media narratives present both conflictual and cooperative interpretations, while the corridor emerges as a site of memory, identity contestation, and potential reconciliation. The study offers insights for policymakers on fostering regional integration while mitigating risks of exclusionary nationalism or geopolitical dominance.

**Keywords:** Zangezur Corridor, South Caucasus, Geopolitics, Geoeconomics, Media Discourse, Cultural Identity, Strategic Corridor

## Introduction

The Zangezur Corridor has emerged as a pivotal geopolitical and geoeconomic nexus in the South Caucasus, symbolizing not only a physical link between East and West but also a contested arena of narratives, power configurations, and cultural representations. Once a dormant transit route overshadowed by historical conflicts, the corridor re-entered international discourse following the Second Karabakh War, as new regional alignments and political aspirations began reshaping the Eurasian connectivity map.

This study approaches the Zangezur Corridor through a multidisciplinary lens, focusing on five interconnected dimensions. The first section, "The Zangezur Corridor and Media Discourses: From Conflict to Peace," examines how international and regional media frame the corridor—as either a vector of confrontation or a platform for post-conflict reconciliation. The second section, "The Zangezur Corridor: A Geopolitical Crossroads in the South Caucasus," analyzes its strategic significance amid competing interests involving Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the EU. From an economic standpoint, the chapter "Economic and Geoeconomic Significance of the Zangezur Corridor" investigates the corridor's potential to reshape trade flows, energy routes, and regional integration mechanisms. The study further explores the cultural and symbolic functions of the corridor in "'Zangezur Corridor' – The Dual Nature of Sociocultural Communications," viewing it not simply as infrastructure but as a channel for historical memory, identity reconstruction, and intercommunal engagement.

By situating the Zangezur Corridor at the intersection of media narratives, geopolitical configurations, economic imperatives, and cultural dynamics, this research aims to offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of one of the most contested and symbolically charged transit routes in the post-Soviet space.

## Methodology

This study employs a mixed qualitative approach:

1. Content Analysis: Examination of global and regional media to identify narrative frames surrounding the Zangezur Corridor.
2. Geopolitical Mapping: Analysis of state and non-state actors' interests, particularly Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the European Union.
3. Discourse Analysis: Investigation of cultural and identity narratives within media and public discourse.

Data were collected from academic journals, news outlets, and social media platforms (e.g., Twitter/X, TikTok). Case studies focus on key stakeholders' roles and media portrayals from 2020 to 2025.

### **The Zangezur Corridor and Media Discourses: From Conflict to Peace**

In recent years, the Zangezur Corridor has become one of the most contested geopolitical and communicative topics in the South Caucasus. The corridor draws the interests of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey and holds strategic importance for global actors, including the European Union, Russia, Iran, and China. Following the signing of Article 9 in the November 2020 Trilateral Declaration, the corridor transcended its initial role as a transport route, evolving into a complex information and discourse arena shaping political, economic, and cultural narratives (Kazimi 2021; Trend News 2024).

Media coverage embeds developments within ideological frames, employing narrative construction, framing, and rhetoric. Azerbaijani media generally depict the corridor as a symbol of regained sovereignty, economic progress, and Turkic cooperation, presenting it as a strategic asset and diplomatic achievement (Modern Diplomacy 2025). In contrast, Armenian media and academic circles adopt a critical stance, viewing the corridor as a threat to national sovereignty and potential pan-Turkic expansionism (Global Affairs 2023; Center for Security Studies 2024).

Turkish media and English-language agencies frame the corridor within the "Middle Corridor" and Turkic unification narratives, emphasizing regional integration and economic development (Yonsei University 2023). Western media recognize its economic promise but express concerns about security and geopolitical competition, particularly between Russia and China (Foreign Policy 2023; Associated Press 2023). Russian media present the corridor as a tool of regional influence, linking it to the "3+3" regional cooperation format (RT 2023). Iranian outlets frame it as a geopolitical threat and manifestation of pan-Turkism (Mehr News 2023). Chinese media, however, focus on economic and logistical aspects within the Belt and Road Initiative (Asian Development Bank 2023).

These representations can be categorized into four frames:

- Peace and Prosperity Frame: Economic cooperation and regional integration (Azerbaijani and Turkish media).
- Threat and Invasion Frame: Sovereignty threats and geopolitical pressure (Armenian media).
- Integration and Regional Unity Frame: Turkic solidarity and connectivity (Turkish media).
- Imperialism and Global Order Frame: Geopolitical rivalry and imperial ambitions (Western and Russian media).

On digital platforms, the corridor functions as both a geographical and ideological symbol. Social media users employ terms such as “Greater Azerbaijan,” “Turan Road,” and “Armenian genocide threat.” Bots and troll accounts, especially from Iran and Russia, amplify disinformation campaigns targeting global audiences (Sharifi 2025; Koolaee and Rashidi 2024). Narrative battles unfold through brief, emotionally charged videos: Armenian sources highlight “Zangezur occupation,” Iran promotes the “Turan route” narrative, Azerbaijani media emphasize a “bridge of trade and cooperation,” and Turkish outlets stress developmental benefits. Nationalist and ultra-populist rhetoric circulates widely on Facebook and Telegram, influencing public discourse.

### **The Zangezur Corridor: A Geopolitical Crossroads in the South Caucasus**

The Zangezur Corridor represents a critical juncture in the South Caucasus, transcending its function as a transit route to become a pivotal element in regional geopolitics and logistics. For Azerbaijan, the corridor restores territorial connectivity with Nakhchivan and expands its transregional reach, reinforcing its strategic role in energy and transportation networks. Aligned with the Trans-Caspian Middle Corridor initiative, Azerbaijan positions itself as a key transit hub linking East-West and North-South corridors, underscoring the project as a symbol of Turkic integration (Kazancı and Barun 570–581).

Baku frames the corridor as a bilateral issue with Armenia to deter external interference, leveraging Turkish support to solidify regional backing. This strategy exemplifies Azerbaijan’s multi-vector diplomacy, balancing sovereignty concerns with regional legitimacy. Turkey views the corridor as a strategic asset to reduce dependency on Iranian transit and enhance access to Central Asia, deepening political and economic integration within the Turkic world (Kazancı and Barun 570–581). Conversely, Armenia opposes the corridor, perceiving it as extraterritorial and threatening its sovereignty, exacerbating ethno-political anxieties (Məmmədov, “Zəngəzur Dəhlizi” 2024; Məmmədov, “Zəngəzur – Adı Silinmiş Yolun Geosiyasi Qayıdışı” 2025).

Georgia, historically a transit hub, faces challenges as the corridor risks undermining its monopoly over regional routes. Maintaining a balanced foreign policy, Georgia seeks to protect its transit interests while integrating with Western partners (Abuselidze 133–148). Russian influence, if expanded, could exacerbate Georgia’s security concerns linked to separatist regions.

Iran strongly opposes the corridor, viewing it as a strategic threat that limits its regional transit role and fosters pan-Turkic separatism within its borders (Koolaee and Rashidi 3–6; Kazemi). Iranian officials consider the corridor a “red line” and pursue diplomatic and military measures to counterbalance its effects (Tehran Times; Mehr News Agency 21 Feb. 2024). Economic sanctions and infrastructural weaknesses, however, constrain Iran’s response.

Russia maintains a cautiously positive stance, seeking to retain influence through oversight per the 2020 trilateral agreement. Moscow balances Iranian concerns while positioning itself as a

regional guarantor, although Armenian resistance and Western engagement complicate its role (The Guardian 6 Sept. 2024). Russia promotes multilateral frameworks like the “3+3” platform to sustain influence.

The United States and the European Union endorse the corridor as a diversification pathway to reduce reliance on Russia and Iran. U.S. officials highlight its potential as a Central Asian export route alternative, advocating transparent governance to foster stability (O’Brien; Sharifi). The EU similarly supports economic and diplomatic oversight while balancing Turkish and Azerbaijani regional influence (Akchabar 2024).

The trilateral meeting in Washington and the initialing of the peace agreement mark a new phase in the geopolitical and geoeconomic architecture of the South Caucasus. This event signals a reconfiguration of regional power and strategic rules of the game, with U.S. involvement and the proposed TRIPP project expanding transit capacities and economic integration. Azerbaijan’s leadership, articulated by President Ilham Aliyev, uses this as a strategic communication platform to reinforce domestic stability and regional influence. China supports the corridor economically within its Belt and Road Initiative, maintaining political neutrality.

Using scenario-based forecasting, four trajectories emerge:

1. Transparent Transit and Regional Consensus (35%): Coordinated Western leadership, Armenian participation, neutral Iranian stance, international supervision—promoting stability and integration.
2. Russian-Controlled Closed Corridor (25%): Russian dominance with Iranian cooperation, marginalizing Western actors, risking instability and regional tensions.
3. Regional Tension and Project Blockade (20%): Heightened distrust, Iranian obstruction, Armenian indecision—project stagnation and lost strategic value.
4. China-Led Infrastructure Model (20%): Chinese investment and diplomacy drive development, with passive U.S. and Russian roles—ensuring sustainability amid rising geopolitical complexity.

The Zangezur Corridor embodies the complex interplay of national ambitions, regional security architectures, and global power rivalries. Its success hinges on multilateral diplomacy, political will, and inclusive security frameworks. Effective management could catalyze Eurasian integration and transform the South Caucasus into a stable transit hub; otherwise, it risks becoming a focal point of conflict and division.

### **Economic and Geoeconomic Significance of the Zangezur Corridor**

During the 3rd Shusha Global Media Forum, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev highlighted the considerable economic potential of the Zangezur Corridor, stating that its initial cargo capacity is estimated at 15 million tons and that the Azerbaijani section of the railway would likely be completed within a year (President of Azerbaijan). He emphasized that the corridor will create a new route within the North-South transport corridor, connecting Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran via Rasht, and further to Türkiye, thereby expanding cargo transportation opportunities.

The corridor's estimated capacity closely approaches the 17.9 million tons projected for the TRACECA corridor in 2023, suggesting a substantial share of regional freight flows could be captured by the Zangezur route (TRACECA Secretariat). According to the World Bank, freight volumes along the Middle Trade and Transport Corridor could triple and travel time could be reduced by approximately 50% by 2030, contingent upon proper policy implementation and investment (World Bank, *Middle Trade and Transport Corridor*). Kenan Gurbanov, Secretary General of the Azerbaijan International Road Carriers Association, noted that the corridor's opening would shorten transport routes and reduce costs (Gurbanov).

Economic integration and increased trade within the corridor are expected to be driven by investment inflows and digital modernization (World Bank, *Middle Trade and Transport Corridor*). President Aliyev's remarks indicate that Azerbaijan's infrastructure is nearing completion, enabling effective utilization of transport routes. Key economic implications include:

- **Investment Profitability:** Investments in transport corridors generate sustained economic benefits and contribute significantly to GDP growth (World Bank, *Belt and Road Economics*).
- **Transit Sector Diversification:** Enhanced connectivity reduces logistics costs, elevates trade turnover, and fosters economic diversification (Aguilar).
- **Multimodal and Transregional Integration:** The corridor facilitates access to Bandar Abbas and Chabahar ports, connecting to the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean, supporting faster and sustainable cargo transport (UNESCAP).
- **Alternative North-South Routes:** Providing alternatives to the congested Russia–Azerbaijan–Iran axis, the corridor increases trade resilience.
- **Trade Competitiveness and Diversification:** The corridor emerges as a reliable route within Azerbaijan's broader logistics strategy, alongside India's INSTC and China–Russia trade alternatives (Asian Development Bank).
- **Geoeconomic Risk Diversification:** Ensures continuity of cargo and energy transport in case of regional disruptions (UNESCAP).

The corridor is positioned to transform Azerbaijan into a logistics hub, enhancing geopolitical profile and regional economic integration. Infrastructure completeness promotes investment stability and accelerates capital flow, while the World Bank's corridor model estimates that each dollar invested generates three to four dollars of economic growth (World Bank, *Middle Trade and Transport Corridor*). Development of logistics terminals, customs, and freight services will increase the non-oil sector's GDP share, aligning with OECD infrastructure-led development strategies (OECD). Socioeconomic benefits include employment creation, urbanization, and improved access to financial and technological resources (Asian Development Bank).

From a geoeconomic perspective, the corridor provides shorter distances and lower transit costs, particularly benefiting Central Asian exporters (World Bank, *Middle Trade and Transport Corridor*; Chedia). Integration with economic zones, such as the Aras Valley and Alat Free Economic Zone, fosters industrial and logistics infrastructure, transforming the corridor into a productive transit and service platform (Asian Development Bank). Unlike politically unstable routes through Iran and Georgia, the corridor benefits from Turkey's NATO membership and Azerbaijan's robust governance (RAND; Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung). Overall, the corridor underpins the Middle Corridor connecting Central Asia and Europe, facilitating regional connectivity, capital circulation, transit revenues, and geoeconomic value (World Bank, *Middle Trade and Transport Corridor*).

Transport corridors generate cross-sectoral synergies and contribute to GDP growth through increased trade turnover, export diversification, expanded services, and job creation (Baldwin and Venables). President Aliyev's statements reflect a comprehensive development vision integrating economic, logistical, and geopolitical planning. The Zangezur Corridor promises non-oil economic diversification, multimodal logistics hub establishment, and a secure geoeconomic platform within the South Caucasus.

### **Zangezur Corridor – The Dual Nature of Sociocultural Communications**

Over the past five years, the concept of the Zangezur Corridor has become highly politicized, predominantly framed in economic, military, and geopolitical terms. However, this study examines the corridor as a medium of socio-cultural communication, emphasizing the dualistic nature of such interactions.

A fundamental distinction exists between political rhetoric and scientific truth. Political rhetoric functions as a language of influence, designed to persuade, mobilize, and evoke emotions. It often simplifies complex realities, constructs enemy images, and resorts to populist appeals tailored to audience expectations. In contrast, scientific truths are grounded in verifiable data, logical reasoning, and empirical repetition, prioritizing accuracy over popularity (Kazimi, 2021). This divergence highlights the conceptual contradictions surrounding discourse on the Zangezur Corridor.

Considering the corridor as a communicative tool requires exploring the historical role of communication in intercultural integration. Communication facilitates interactions among diverse peoples and encompasses broader processes of cultural, economic, and political rapprochement. It can build bridges through dialogue, shared cultural heritage, and exchange, yet simultaneously reinforce stereotypes, propagate misinformation, and exacerbate divisions under ideological media influence and censorship. Communication thus operates both as an instrument and an arena of intercultural integration, serving peacekeeping or aggressive ends. Historical evidence demonstrates that despite occasional conflicts, processes fostering cultural understanding and coexistence have prevailed, supporting the notion that “building bridges is better than erecting walls.”

Live communication enables intercultural bridges and progressive dialogue, facilitating the transmission of scientific, religious, and philosophical knowledge, trade practices, linguistic convergence, and shared artistic values. Conversely, politically motivated communication often preserves and deepens cultural differences. From the 2nd century BCE to the 15th century CE, the Great Silk Road exemplified such multidimensional communication, serving not only as a trade route but also as a conduit for the transmission of Buddhism, Islamic philosophy, inventions, literature, and cultural practices across Eurasia. Despite intermittent isolationist tendencies, the overarching trajectory favored globalization, evidenced by the dominance of Latin in medieval Europe, Arabic during the Arab Golden Age, and Turkic scripts preserving Eurasian identities.

The invention of the printing press and mass media—newspapers, radio, and television—expanded communication reach, facilitating mass education and fostering national languages and collective identities. In the 20th century, mass media shaped global culture while enabling both colonial propaganda and anti-colonial resistance (Project and Innovation Activity of Libraries, 2020). Today, digital communications and social networks erase borders, promoting global cultural trends through multilingual platforms that reduce barriers to intercultural access.

Nonetheless, digital expansion carries risks of neocolonialism, reflecting dominance by major powers in the information space. Classical communication forms persist and evolve alongside digital media, supporting a balanced interplay between local, regional, and global digital spaces. Communication’s dual nature is evident—it can unify or generate conflict. Despite the accessibility of online sources such as Google or Wikipedia, classical media—curated by editorial oversight—provides coherence, depth, and critical thinking capacity beyond immediate emotional responses (Kazimi, 2017).

Content alone is insufficient in socio-cultural communication; fostering correct and critical thinking is crucial. Digital environments often encourage “clip thinking,” characterized by fragmented perception and emotional reaction rather than analytical understanding. Classical media stimulate deeper engagement, long-term memory, and active discussion, positioning the

audience as participants rather than mere observers. Trust, essential in personal communication, underpins conflict resolution, education, and therapy. Rituals, greetings, interviews, and live interactions foster belonging and enable nuanced social assessment unavailable in purely digital exchanges.

Institutions of classical communication—parliaments, universities, libraries, government bodies, newspapers, and media organizations—serve as democratic and cultural guarantors, shaping public opinion and providing structured discourse. Without them, the digital realm risks devolving into informational anarchy, where, for instance, a blogger's voice might overshadow expert scientific opinion. Digital and classical communication forms are better viewed as synergistic rather than competitive. While contradictions persist, a balanced integration of local, regional, and global actors is expected to emerge (Kazimi, 2017). Classical communication has “survived” digital transformation by complementing internet advantages, emphasizing qualitative differences, and compensating for digital shortcomings, thereby preserving cultural and scientific heritage and enabling the creation of durable meanings.

The Internet accelerates information exchange but does not replace classical communication's cultural significance. Exchange of ethnic identity markers—musical cultures, culinary similarities, clothing, and taste preferences—continues to strengthen intercultural bonds, affirming the ongoing relevance of traditional communication forms. Comparative analyses of classical and digital communication in education, politics, and culture reveal distinct advantages and limitations, suggesting that both remain indispensable in contemporary society.

### **Conclusion**

The media discourses surrounding the Zangezur Corridor exemplify the complexities of regional and global information confrontations, ideological polarization, and the emergence of a new communicative environment. Beyond its physical function as a transport route, the corridor operates as a symbolic space shaped and contested through media narratives, representing a communicative map marking the transition from conflict towards peace. Media can function simultaneously as a bridge facilitating dialogue and as a barrier reinforcing division. Consequently, sustainable peace in the region depends on balanced, dialogic, and fact-based media discourses (Kazancı & Barun 45; Trend News 2024).

Given this dual role, media professionals bear significant responsibility. Journalism and media practices should anchor reporting in factual accuracy, encourage transnational dialogue, represent multiple viewpoints, enhance media literacy, and advocate for algorithmic transparency to ensure diversity and balance (Kazimi, *Communication in Eurasia* 112). The Zangezur Corridor is therefore not only a transit route but also a critical discursive object shaping future regional peace through its mediated representation.

Strategically, the corridor emerges as a nexus where national ambitions, regional alignments, and global rivalries converge. Azerbaijan positions the corridor as a vehicle for regional leadership and transcontinental integration, while other stakeholders—including Armenia, Iran, Turkey, Russia, and Western powers—interpret it through distinct strategic prisms (Məmmədov 78–80; Koolaee & Rashidi 2024). These divergent perspectives underscore the corridor's function both as a geopolitical instrument and a contested space of influence. Its future trajectory will depend on diplomatic coordination, regional security assurances, and sustained international engagement. Possible scenarios range from inclusive multilateral governance frameworks to securitized and polarized outcomes dominated by major powers. The most viable long-term model prioritizes a transparent, rules-based transit regime harmonizing economic cooperation with sovereignty and stability.

Economically and geoeconomically, the Zangezur Corridor represents a transformative initiative extending beyond its logistical role. It is poised to become a vital artery within the evolving transportation and trade architecture of the South Caucasus and broader Eurasia. Its significance lies in facilitating shorter, cost-efficient freight routes, catalyzing cross-sectoral development, enhancing regional integration, and enabling Azerbaijan's strategic transition from a transit country to a logistics and services hub (World Bank 2023; Gurbanov 25). Its projected capacity—comparable to major corridors such as TRACECA and the Middle Corridor—positions it to substantially influence freight flows between Asia and Europe. Nearing completion, the infrastructure is set to accelerate capital flows and attract investment, supported by empirical evidence from corridor economics highlighting positive impacts on GDP growth, employment, and regional development (ADB 2021; OECD 2020).

Geopolitically, the corridor aligns with initiatives like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and provides critical diversification amid vulnerabilities along existing routes via Russia, Iran, and Georgia (UNESCAP 2022; Chedia 56). Its integration with free economic zones, multimodal networks, and logistics parks amplifies its economic complexity and value-added potential. Anchored within a relatively stable geopolitical axis formed by Azerbaijan and Türkiye, it enhances reliability as a secure transit corridor. Structurally, the corridor supports Azerbaijan's broader economic diversification goals beyond hydrocarbons. The growth of logistics, customs, and value-added services aligns with inclusive infrastructure development principles advocated by international institutions (World Bank 2019; ADB 2021).

From a sociocultural communication perspective, the corridor embodies a dual nature extending beyond geopolitical and economic dimensions. As both a physical passage and symbolic conduit, it can serve as a bridge fostering cultural exchange or a barrier reinforcing ideological polarization. Historical precedents—from the Silk Road to the evolution of classical and digital communication mediums—demonstrate that communication is fundamental to civilizational interaction (Kazimi

2017; Project and Innovation Activity of Libraries 2020). Within this framework, the Zangezur Corridor emerges not solely as a transit route but as a platform for constructing narratives, negotiating identities, and conducting cultural diplomacy.

The juxtaposition of political rhetoric and scientific truth further highlights the necessity of balancing emotionally charged discourse with evidence-based policy-making. Political communication often simplifies and mobilizes, whereas scientific discourse demands verification, critical reflection, and long-term comprehension (Kazimi, *Communication in Eurasia* 118). Recognizing this distinction is essential for understanding the corridor's sociocultural impact. In the contemporary digital era, classical and modern communication channels coexist dynamically. Classical forms—including books, lectures, and live interactions—stabilize cultural memory and foster trust, while digital media accelerates global exchange yet introduces risks such as neocolonialism and fragmented perceptions.

Ultimately, the Zangezur Corridor exemplifies infrastructure functioning simultaneously in material and symbolic realms. Its success as a facilitator of intercultural connectivity hinges not only on political will and economic investment but equally on the promotion of inclusive, ethical, and pluralistic communication. By bridging tradition and modernity, rhetoric and reason, the corridor can evolve into a shared cultural space founded on dialogue, critical engagement, and mutual respect.

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