

# “MIDDLE CORRIDOR” TRANSIT ROUTE AND BLACK SEA SECURITY

BEKA MANAGADZE

PhD Students in Political Science at Caucasus International University

E-Mail: beka.managadze@ciu.edu.ge

ORCID: 0009-0008-4203-1856

**Abstract:** The geopolitical changes of the 21st century, particularly the Russia-Ukraine war that began in 2022, have significantly altered Eurasian transit routes. The growing political, economic, and security risks surrounding traditional transport channels have made the search for alternative corridors essential. One such alternative route is the „Middle Corridor“ (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route – TITR), which gains particular importance in the context of new geopolitical realities. This article explores Georgia’s role in the development of the „Middle Corridor“ and the potential it holds for establishing strategic advantages in international transit competition.

Although the volume of cargo transported via the Middle Corridor increased by 86% in 2023, several challenges still remain, such as the harmonization of regulations, simplification of customs procedures, and increased political coordination. The article also emphasizes that the development of the Middle Corridor depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on political synchronization, economic vision, and regional cooperation, where Georgia plays a significant role.

Georgia’s strategic location between Asia and Europe, along with infrastructure projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and port development, particularly the Anaklia deep-water port, supports Georgia’s role as a transit hub. In the political context, it is important for Georgia to maintain diplomatic balance between the European Union, China, Turkey, and Central Asia in managing security and diplomatic challenges.

Georgia must strengthen three strategic areas: infrastructure development, regional and global political integration, and internal political balance. Additionally, ensuring stability in the Black Sea region is crucial for the long-term success of the „Middle Corridor.“

**Key words:** Middle Corridor; Trans-Caspian Route (TITR); Georgia; Eurasian Transit; Geopolitics; Infrastructure Development; Anaklia Port; Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway; Regional Cooperation; Security; Political Coordination; Diplomatic Balance; Black Sea Region.

\* \* \*

**Introduction.** The global geopolitical reality of the 21st century and the structural transformation of international economic relations, particularly following the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war, are sharply altering the Eurasian transit architecture. The growing political, economic, and security risks of traditional transport routes have increased the need for alternative paths, among which the „Middle Corridor“ (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route – TITR) has gained particular importance.

Despite the growing strategic and logistical potential of this route, it is clear that regional countries, including Georgia, still do not have a fully articulated vision, specific strategic policies, and sufficient resources to efficiently develop the corridor and engage in international competition.

This scientific article examines Georgia’s role and opportunities in the development of the Middle Corridor against the backdrop of global geopolitical transformations and how the country can gain a sustainable strategic advantage in transit competition.

The aim of the study is to analyze Georgia’s infrastructure, geopolitical, and diplomatic potential in the context of the new reality, identify existing challenges and opportunities, and present recommendations that will facilitate the country’s effective integration into the regional transit network.

The research methods used include case study, comparative analysis, and content analysis.

## Middle Corridor and Georgia's Role in the Context of New Geopolitical Realities

The „Middle Corridor“ represents a strategic transport route that starts in China and heads towards Europe through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. This route has become a significant alternative to traditional transport routes, making it highly important in global trade.

The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) was officially established in February 2014 with the participation of leading companies in the maritime and railway sectors from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia.

The Russia-Ukraine war, which began in 2022, caused significant geopolitical and geoeconomic changes that directly impacted the Middle Corridor project and, in this context, the role of Georgia as an important transit country.<sup>1</sup>

The war greatly weakened traditional transport routes passing through Russia and Belarus. Western sanctions and the logistical risks caused by the war forced companies to seek alternative routes from China to Europe. In this context, the Middle Corridor emerged as one of the most viable alternatives.

It is noteworthy that in 2023, the volume of cargo transported via the Middle Corridor reached 2.7 million tons, an 86% increase compared to the 2022 figures. Currently, 25 companies from 11 countries are involved in the project, which ensures even greater integration and regional cooperation.

For Georgia, the Middle Corridor is particularly important as a transit hub. The country's free trade agreements with China, Turkey, and the European Union support the full realization of the corridor's potential. Large-scale infrastructure projects along the East-West corridor, which connect Asia and Europe through Georgia, are being implemented to strengthen the country's transport role.

The 2023 Tbilisi Silk Road Forum proved to be a significant milestone in discussions concerning Georgia's geopolitical and transit role. This meeting, with representatives from over 60 countries and international organizations, clearly highlighted the increasing international interest in the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, or the Middle Corridor. In the context of rising geopolitical tensions and competition among major powers, the Middle Corridor has truly become an alternative route that strengthens economic ties between Europe and Asia – with Georgia playing a central role in this process.

The main messages presented at the forum not only concerned infrastructure projects but also the political, economic, and security challenges related to the realization of the Middle Corridor. For instance, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili emphasized in his speech that Georgia is not just a transit country, but a partner offering stability, predictability, and a sustainable foundation for development to the region. This positioning was not mere rhetoric – it corresponds to the specific steps the country has taken in recent years, whether in infrastructure modernization, railway network renewal, or the development of cargo terminals.

At the same time, the forum showcased that the Middle Corridor is not just physical infrastructure – it is an idea that requires political synchronization, an economic vision, and regional cooperation.<sup>2</sup> This is where Georgia's significant role as a „connecting link“ comes into focus. A country historically located at the crossroads of civilizations, Georgia is now developing this legacy in a new context and seeks to engage in the process of forming the Middle Corridor not as a marginal player but as an active architect.

Discussions held at the Tbilisi Forum revealed that, despite the existing successes, many challenges remain – including the harmonization of regulations, simplification of customs procedures, the creation of digital platforms, and improvements in political-level coordination. However, it is important to note that there is increasingly open discussion about these issues, and participants are not hesitant to make

---

<sup>1</sup> Batumelebi. (2023). ანაკლიის ღრმანჯლოვანი პორტის პროექტი: სტრატეგიული მნიშვნელობა და გამოწვევები. Retrieved from <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge>

<sup>2</sup> Coffey, L. (2022). The strategic importance of the Black Sea region. Heritage Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org>

critical assessments. This means that the initiative is moving into a phase where declarations alone are not enough – concrete steps and the taking of relevant commitments are necessary.

For Georgia, the Middle Corridor is not only an economic project but an opportunity to outline the contours of its political future. One of the main challenges in the country's foreign policy is balancing multilateral partnerships, which takes on specific nuances in the context of the Middle Corridor. The connection with China, Turkey, Central Asia, and the European Union, both within the framework of the transit project and in the broader context of strategic partnership, creates a dynamic that develops Georgia as an intermediary – not only geographically but also in terms of political significance.

### **Infrastructure Development and Economic Potential**

For the Middle Corridor to become a competitive and reliable route, a strong infrastructure base is needed to ensure continuous and efficient logistical flows.<sup>1</sup> Georgia has initiated several projects in this direction. One of the most significant initiatives is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, which is already operational, but work is currently underway to increase its capacity. During the Tbilisi Silk Road Forum, special attention was given to the modernization plan for the railway, which aims to increase speed and volume, ultimately leading to a growth in freight turnover.

At the same time, the potential of the ports of Poti and Anaklia remains a significant issue. While Poti already plays an important role in the Black Sea ports network, the Anaklia deep-water port project symbolically represents Georgia's ambitions. This project, which has been halted and reconsidered several times, remains both an economic and geopolitical symbol. Calls were made at the forum for international investors to actively engage in the development of the Anaklia project. The Georgian government emphasizes that such infrastructure could be transformative not only for the local economy but for the entire region.

From an economic perspective, the development of the Middle Corridor means not only an increase in cargo transport but also strengthening the local logistics, services, and manufacturing sectors. Georgia has the potential to become a transit hub that not only transports goods from east to west but also processes, redistributes, stores, and re-allocates them, which will foster job growth and technological development. This, however, requires attracting private investments and the formulation and implementation of sound state policies.

### **International Cooperation and Political Dimension**

The success of the Middle Corridor depends not only on the processes within a single country but also on regional cooperation as a whole. A significant role in the forum was given to deepening multilateral dialogue – specifically, the trilateral format between Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, which already forms a core structure of the route.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, these countries have signed numerous agreements aimed at standardizing transportation tariffs, harmonizing customs procedures, and developing unified digital platforms, which will make the route more transparent and reliable for freight carriers.

At the same time, the interests of the European Union and China are also becoming increasingly apparent. For the European Union, the Middle Corridor is seen as an alternative route to reduce dependence on Russia – both in terms of energy resources and other strategic goods. For China, it serves as an additional route within the „Belt and Road Initiative“ (BRI), which not only strengthens Beijing's economic influence across the Eurasian continent but also provides it with a crucial political platform.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cornell, S. E. (2020). Geopolitics and strategic alignments in the South Caucasus. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Delcour, L. (2021). The EU and the geopolitics of connectivity in the South Caucasus. EUISS Brief. <https://www.iss.europa.eu>

Georgia's diplomatic challenge starts from this point – on one hand, the country seeks to be a pro-European and Euro-Atlantic member, while on the other hand, it strives to maintain economic ties with global powers like China and Turkey. In this context, the Middle Corridor becomes a platform where Georgia can balance these alliances, which undoubtedly requires a delicate foreign policy approach.

### **Political Risks and Security Issues**

The geopolitical location of the Middle Corridor inherently means that it cannot be devoid of security risks. The Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Black Sea region remain unstable areas in terms of political stability. Wars in Ukraine and Gaza, tensions between Iran and the West, and crises in neighboring regions – these factors all contribute to a sense of uncertainty that directly impacts economic and infrastructure projects. For Georgia, which often presents itself as the „outpost of the West,“ it must operate in a complex and constantly changing environment.

The stable operation of the Middle Corridor requires not only physical security (protection of transport routes, cybersecurity, etc.) but also political predictability. It is this latter factor that often hinders long-term investments. Political instability and the uncertainty surrounding future developments in neighboring regions create an environment where investors are cautious. Ensuring a secure and stable environment is therefore essential for the sustained growth and success of the Middle Corridor as a key transit route.

This underscores the importance of Georgia's role not just as a transit country, but as a stabilizing factor in the region. Its ability to mitigate political risks and provide a predictable and secure framework will be crucial for attracting international investments and facilitating regional cooperation.

### **Strategic Vision: Georgia's Role and Future Steps**

In order for Georgia to truly transform into a key anchor point of the Middle Corridor, three strategic directions must be simultaneously strengthened: infrastructure development, political integration into regional and global formats, and the balancing of national policies with the new geopolitical realities.

Firstly, infrastructure enhancement should become not only an economic but also a security and foreign policy component. This includes not only building physical connections such as railways, ports, and logistical hubs, but also developing technological infrastructure. The modern corridor increasingly relies on digital governance: real-time monitoring of freight flows, automation of customs procedures, and the integration of various platforms. The Georgian government must ensure the implementation of digital terminals and unified management systems, offering a service to freight carriers that is fast, transparent, and competitive compared to other alternatives.<sup>1</sup>

The second direction is deepening coordination with regional countries. Georgia is already participating in trilateral mechanisms with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, but in the future, it is advisable to expand these formats – countries like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and China could also be included. At the same time, the European Union and Turkey should remain key partners in this process. As a transit country, Georgia can become a platform for regional and global dialogue, for example, by hosting the „Middle Corridor Partnership Forum“ annually in Tbilisi, both on political and business levels.<sup>2</sup> This would further strengthen the country's role as a hub and organizer.

Furthermore, special attention must be paid to the sustainability of domestic politics. The success of the corridor will largely depend on the country's internal stability – political, economic, and legal. Investors and international partners typically demand a predictable and institutionally sound environment. This implies deepening judicial reforms and implementing competitive economic policies. If the state can ensure legal security and equal conditions for both local and foreign companies, Georgia will become even more attractive as both a logistical and manufacturing destination.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gogolashvili, K. (2021). Georgia's role in Eurasian transport connectivity. Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies.

<sup>2</sup> Gvalia, G., & Lebanidze, B. (2020). Georgia's foreign policy in a turbulent region: Coping with vulnerability and strategic uncertainty. *Caucasus Survey*, 8(1), 47–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2019.1685802>

In summary, Georgia's role in the future development of the Middle Corridor hinges on a holistic approach – one that combines robust infrastructure, strengthened regional cooperation, and a stable, predictable political environment. These elements will help solidify Georgia's position as a central player in the evolving Eurasian transit landscape.<sup>1</sup>

### **Black Sea Security in the Context of the Middle Corridor**

The success of the Middle Corridor is undoubtedly linked to the stability and quality of security in the Black Sea region. This area is geographically small, yet one of the most sensitive and competitive geopolitical regions, encompassing NATO member countries (Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria), associate and candidate countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova), and revisionist, aggressive Russia, which controls important naval bases in Crimea.<sup>2</sup>

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, has significantly altered the regional balance of power and exacerbated risks, which are clearly reflected in the security of logistical corridors. For example, the blockade of Ukrainian ports and military actions in the Black Sea have created serious threats to maritime cargo transport, increased the cost of transit routes, and heightened vulnerability.

In this context, Georgia, located on the southeastern coast of the Black Sea, has effectively become the only secure „gateway“ connecting Central Asia to Europe via the sea. This creates both significant opportunities and responsibilities. The long-term viability of the corridor is directly tied to the security of the Black Sea.

Georgia's strategic location not only positions it as a key player in the Black Sea's maritime logistics but also places it at the center of a broader geopolitical struggle. The country's ability to ensure the safety of transit routes and manage regional tensions is crucial for maintaining the flow of goods through the Middle Corridor. Without a stable and secure Black Sea environment, the corridor's potential to serve as a vital connection between Asia and Europe would be severely compromised.

Thus, Georgia's role in safeguarding the Black Sea and, by extension, the Middle Corridor, requires strong naval and security capabilities, regional cooperation, and diplomatic efforts to mitigate the impacts of regional instability.

### **Three Key Aspects of Security for Georgia:**

**Maritime Security and NATO Involvement:** Georgia actively cooperates with NATO on Black Sea security, including information sharing, joint training, and strengthening coastal defense. The role of NATO member countries (Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria) is crucial in maintaining a security zone in the western and southern parts of the Black Sea, which ensures the safe movement of goods. For Georgia, deepening this cooperation should become a priority, including through modernization of naval infrastructure and intensification of joint training exercises. Strengthening its maritime capabilities in collaboration with NATO is essential for ensuring the safety and security of the Middle Corridor and Georgia's broader strategic interests.<sup>3</sup>

**Hybrid Threats and Critical Infrastructure Protection:** Alongside traditional military threats, there is an increasing level of hybrid threats – cyberattacks, informational manipulation, and economic pressure. Port infrastructure in the Black Sea region, such as Poti, Batumi, and the future Anaklia port, may

---

<sup>1</sup> Kupchan, C. A., & Litwak, R. S. (2023). After the war in Ukraine: Building new security architecture. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org>

<sup>2</sup> Middle Corridor. (2023). Official website of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. Retrieved from <https://middlecorridor.com>

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. (2023). Annual Report on Infrastructure and Transport Development. Retrieved from <https://www.economy.ge>



become targets for cyberattacks or disinformation campaigns. Strengthening not only technical systems but also developing a regional cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection policy is essential. Collaborative efforts with neighboring countries, NATO, and other international partners will be key to securing critical infrastructure and preventing destabilizing activities in the region.<sup>1</sup>

**Activation of Black Sea Regional Platforms:** Georgia can take the initiative in rethinking or creating new Black Sea security platforms that encompass Black Sea corridors, ports, maritime routes, and energy infrastructure. For example, the establishment of a Black Sea Infrastructure Security Dialogue could become a new mechanism where both military and civilian-logistical security issues are discussed. This regional platform could facilitate cooperation between Black Sea countries on various security aspects, strengthening Georgia's role as a key player in regional security and stability.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

Georgia faces a historic opportunity – the Middle Corridor has the potential to become not just a transit route but a strategic economic platform that will enhance the country's international role and foster a new wave of domestic development. To achieve this, the following steps are essential:

**Modernization of Infrastructure and Integration of New Projects:** The integration of railway and port systems into a unified logistics network, including the activation of the Anaklia deep-water port.

**Integration of Digital Technologies in Logistics Management:** Creating unified electronic platforms with neighboring countries, which will reduce bureaucratic barriers and increase efficiency.

**Strengthening Regional and Global Cooperation:** Enhancing trilateral and multilateral formats, integrating European and Asian stakeholders into the management of the corridor.

**Accelerating Domestic Reforms:** Continuing efforts to strengthen institutional integrity, uphold the rule of law, and improve the business environment.

**Transforming the Corridor into a Political Agenda:** The Middle Corridor should evolve into not just an economic project but a strategic component of foreign and security policy, which will facilitate the country's integration into global networks.

The Middle Corridor is not just a geographical advantage for Georgia – it represents an opportunity that requires a vision, consistent policy, and close collaboration with international partners. If this opportunity is properly utilized, Georgia will not only perform a mediating role but will become a strategically important regional player on the new Eurasian logistics map.

### Bibliography

- Batumelebi. (2023). *ანაკლიის ღრმანყოფანი პორტის პროექტი: სტრატეგიული მნიშვნელობა და გამოწვევები*. Retrieved from <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge>
- Coffey, L. (2022). *The strategic importance of the Black Sea region*. Heritage Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org>
- Cornell, S. E. (2020). *Geopolitics and strategic alignments in the South Caucasus*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.
- Delcour, L. (2021). *The EU and the geopolitics of connectivity in the South Caucasus*. EUISS Brief. <https://www.iss.europa.eu>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. (2023). Annual Report on Infrastructure and Transport Development. Retrieved from <https://www.economy.ge>

- Gogolashvili, K. (2021). *Georgia's role in Eurasian transport connectivity*. Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies.
- Gvalia, G., & Lebanidze, B. (2020). *Georgia's foreign policy in a turbulent region: Coping with vulnerability and strategic uncertainty*. *Caucasus Survey*, 8(1), 47–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2019.1685802>
- Kupchan, C. A., & Litwak, R. S. (2023). *After the war in Ukraine: Building new security architecture*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org>
- Middle Corridor. (2023). *Official website of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route*. Retrieved from <https://middlecorridor.com>
- Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. (2023). *Annual Report on Infrastructure and Transport Development*. Retrieved from <https://www.economy.ge>
- Peyrouse, S. (2022). *Connectivity strategies and geopolitical competition in Central Asia*. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 63(5), 540–559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2022.2072598>