

MIDDLE CORRIDOR AND ITS POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES - 11.10.2022

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Blog No: 38
11.10.2022

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With the ongoing war of Russia on Ukraine, the global supply chains have taken a hit. Previous to that, global supply chains had already been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. The war has exacerbated the issues with major supply chains. For this reason, today, the system is in need of diversifying its trade and transport routes, as well as reshaping its logistics flow[1]. Particularly due to the war and the pandemic, the competitiveness of the Northern Corridor was diminished[2]. In contrast, the Middle Corridor, which is a multi-transportation route, has been under the limelight for a while. In fact, a positive trend was observed in the development of the Middle Corridor after the Russo-Ukranian war[3].

The Middle Corridor, or with its long name, the Trans Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative, starts from Turkey and passes through the Caucasus via Georgia, Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and ends in China[4]. In fact, the Middle Corridor passes through Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Caspian Transit corridor by rail and road[5]. Then, it reaches China via Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan route[6]. The route of the Middle Corridor attaches importance to the ports of Baku (Azerbaijan), Aktau (Kazakhstan), and Turkmenbashi (Turkmenistan), which are the main points for transportation on Caspian Transit Corridor[7].

The Middle Corridor is a crucial effort to reestablish the ancient Silk Road[8]. In this

context, it integrates with Chinas Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)[9].

The Middle Corridor promises benefits for many countries. It was designed to bring prosperity to the European Union, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Türkiye, all of which are situated in the Chinese export route[10]. The Corridor offers opportunities for countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus to diversify their markets and recieved investments from European firms[11].

As a matter of fact, the Middle Corridor will bring several benefits to the landlocked Central Asian countries. Therefore, the Trans Caspian cooperation and infrastructure can be improved by this trade route with the establishment of free trade zones and logistical centers in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan[12]. In particular, it can be said that the establishment of the Middle Corridor will provide economic recovery to the Central Asian countries that have been hit hard by the pandemic. In addition to those advantages, the Middle Corridor will allow Central Asian countries to be less dependent on Russia in terms of infrastructure and logistics. It is known that the infrastructure of the Central Asian countries, despite all the developments since the end of the Cold War, are still mostly connected with Russia[13]. With the establishment of the Middle Corridor, the Central Asian countries can now acquire new roads and logistical ties.

Therefore, Ankara plays a crucial role due to its ties with the countries which are located in the route of the Middle Corridor[14]. Türkiye already has extensive business and trade ties with those countries[15]. In the Turkish view, Türkiye can increase its presence in Central Asian countries with the establishment of the Middle Corridor. This will happen through the increase of Turkish exports to Central Asia and increase in the import of raw materials from there[16]. Another significant benefit of the Middle Corridor to Türkiye is that it can improve the relations between Türkiye and the EU. There is no doubt that the EU- Türkiye relations have been strained for over a decade[17]. The partial improvement of relations can be accomplished by enhancing trade and business links via the Middle Corridor. Thus, it is beneficial for the EU since the countries which are located in the Middle Corridor route will be both exporters and importers for the EU in terms of natural gas and digitalization. Connecting Central Asia with the South Caucasus region can allow the EU to have a role in developing new markets[18].

Furthermore, the establishment of the Middle Corridor stands as an opportunity for the South Caucasus countries in terms of economic recovery and diversifying their business ties. In general, countries in the South Caucasus will have better trade relations with Europe due to increasing network of routes[19].

Apart from those, it has other advantages such as feasibility. When it is compared with the Northern Corridor, it can be seen that the Middle Corridor is a much more economical and faster trade route since it is 2000 km shorter, offers better climate conditions, and reduces the travel time by 15 days[20]. It is thus much more desirable to use the Middle Corridor instead of the Northern Corridor. Geographically, it is the shortest trade route between west of the China and the EU[21]. Thus, the Middle Corridor is beneficial for the cargo traffic in Asia, as it can reach the Middle East, North Africa, and Mediterranean region via ports in Türkiye[22]. Indeed, it is expected that the cargo transportation will

increase six-fold to 3.2 million metric tons in 2022, compared to the previous year[23].

Finally, it can be concluded that the Middle Corridor is beneficial for more than one region and more than one country as it will bring new connections, dialogue mechanisms, transport and logistic flows to the countries that are located in the route. In this sense, it can be said that the Middle Corridor offers many opportunities of prosperity and diversification for multiple countries, promising a truly win-win situation for all involved countries.

*Photograph: *https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa*

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To cite this article: Deniz ÜNVER. 2026. "MIDDLE CORRIDOR AND ITS POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES - 11.10.2022." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Blog No.2022 / 38. October 11. Accessed October

31, 2026. https://avimbulten.org/Blog/MIDDLE-CORRIDOR-AND-ITS-POTENTIAL-ADVANTAGES-11-10-2022

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