

Significance of the Zangezur Corridor for Regional Cooperation and Future Trajectory

The reforms and opening-up initiatives launched by the visionary leadership of Azerbaijan after the second Karabakh war have freed people's minds and inspired them to boldly explore new frontiers. The reconstruction process in the liberated areas along with the development of corridors has been playing a crucial role in reinvigorating regional cooperation and inclusive economic development. The prudent policies of His Excellency President Ilham Aliyev have provided a new impetus to enhance socioeconomic and cultural linkages with the regional states. The successful internal initiatives of making the liberated areas into smart/digital cities will improve and boost public morale. Azerbaijan is among one of the fastest-growing economies in the South Caucasian region. Progressive and sustainable in its development goals, the leadership has been constructively working to foster regional integration.

In this aspect, the government of Azerbaijan has made unremitting efforts to explore new ways of realizing people's democracy and increasing economic outreach. It is noteworthy that the country has started that over-all development process without any external funding and support as all progress has been made through the government's own funds and contribution to the nation. These resilient attributes have steered the nation in a new direction to develop the Zangezur corridor. It is a 43-kilometre stretch of land along Armenia's border with Iran. In Soviet times, this area used to provide a road and railway connection between Nakhchivan and mainland Azerbaijan. Although the "Zangezur Corridor" was not mentioned by name, the planned corridor is given that name because it passes through the region of Zangezur, a historical name for the land inhabited by Azerbaijanis until their expulsion in 1988-89 (Armenians call this region Syunik). Even though the length of the corridor is not great and it does not cover a big area on the global

map, it possesses great geopolitical importance and will have potential impacts on the transport communication architecture of the region that has developed over recent decades.

Nevertheless, new prospects for regionalism and broader cooperation have emerged with the liberation of Azerbaijan's districts. Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories was the main obstacle that prevented access to the corridor. Therefore, after the war, the issue of the opening of the Zangezur Corridor was raised by Azerbaijan and included in the Trilateral Statement.

Development is a journey with no end, only new beginnings. The construction of the Zangezur corridor will enhance Azerbaijan's global outreach and economic development. Great visions require actions and the visionary leadership under President Aliyev has been practically implementing all sound policies and effective plans for regional connectivity and alliances. Thus, it is a high time that Armenia shed nationalist rhetoric of confrontation and indulge into a peaceful settlement for common development. The Corridor will create immense opportunities not only for Azerbaijan but also for Armenia, Iran, Georgia, Turkey, and Russia. The opening up of the corridor will stimulate economic connectivity, regional transportation, and communication lines as well as enhance cooperation in many other areas of mutual interest for the regional stakeholders.

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