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Turkey Announces a New Path to Communicative Integration of the Turkic World

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is deliberately advancing a policy rooted in the doctrine of pan-Turanism. With gains achieved in Syria, Ankara now aims to establish control over Armenia's Syunik province, seeking the shortest route to integration with the rest of the Turkic world.



Why is the “Zangezur Corridor” through Armenia's Syunik region important to Turkey?

Geography always shapes the contours of politics. After World War I, Turkey was forced to accept the loss of its imperial status, having sided with Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany and ending up among the defeated.

However, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire was not solely a consequence of World War I. It had been foretold by the empire-wide crisis of the 19th century, during which the

Ottomans were often referred to as “the sick man of Europe.” Internal contradictions, compounded by foreign interference, led to Istanbul’s retreat from the Balkans, North Africa, and Arabia.

The uncontrolled collapse of the polyethnic Ottoman state was never in the interests of the great powers. Not every part of the “Greater Middle Eastern Question” enjoyed support from Europe or Russia. Greece, for instance, never succeeded in securing Constantinople or Smyrna; “Wilsonian Armenia” remained a theoretical construct never realized in the Treaty of Sèvres, and the Kurdish question remains unresolved to this day.

Whenever Ankara placed its bets on a “strong West” — be it Germany, Britain, or the United States — to counter Russia, its efforts failed

At the Lausanne Conference in 1923, Kemal Pasha had no choice but to accept the victorious powers’ terms and the new status of Turkey as a regional state. Yet post-imperial political consciousness in Turkey has never lost its relevance. Turkish leaders and diplomats have since attempted to exploit favorable historical moments (such as World War II, the Cold War, and the dissolution of the USSR) to rekindle imperial ambitions.

Whenever Ankara placed its bets on a “strong West” — be it Germany, Britain, or the United States — to counter Russia, its efforts failed. In the early 21st century, Turkey began to draw lessons from history, seeking to build bridges with post-Soviet Russia and asserting greater independence from the West. Within this paradigm, Ankara did not abandon its revisionist plans, whether through the lens of neo-Ottomanism (concerning the post-Ottoman world) or neo-Pan-Turanism (concerning the newly independent Turkic states).

As a result, in the first quarter of the 21st century, Turkey has achieved considerable geoeconomic and geopolitical success. In particular, its alignment with the Anglo-Saxon powers in the 1990s and the weakening of Russia enabled Turkey to bypass Moscow and secure a route into Azerbaijan, facilitating the export of Caspian oil and gas to Europe. Ironically, it was later Russia that began developing active energy partnerships with Turkey, enhancing Turkey’s role as a major international transit hub.

Today, Turkey has effectively become a global energy crossroads, offering Europe alternative access to oil and gas. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis and sweeping Western sanctions against Moscow have only amplified Turkey’s strategic importance as a transit country.

The military success of the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 further energized pan-Turkic integration. On June 15, 2021, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed the Shusha Declaration on Strategic Partnership, which is open to accession by other Turkic

nations. Ahead of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) summit in Budapest on May 21, 2025, Uzbekistan passed legislation joining the Shusha Declaration. The transformation of the “Turkic Council” — originally created in October 2009 in Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan) — into the Organization of Turkic States in November 2021 in Istanbul was also a direct outcome of the military victory in Karabakh.

Accordingly, Turkey and Azerbaijan are pursuing regional leadership in the South Caucasus, supporting China’s “Belt and Road” initiative and its “Middle Corridor” linking East and West via the Turkic world. They are also promoting the strategic transport and communications project known as the “Zangezur Corridor” through Armenia’s Meghri district in Syunik — a route that would offer the most direct physical connection between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Turkestan.

A Peaceful or Military Resolution for the Zangezur Corridor?

Since 2021, after gaining control over Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Turkey have launched an aggressive campaign to build modern infrastructure (including highways, rail lines, and airports) toward Syunik. Turkish Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Abdulkadir Uraloğlu has stated that Ankara and Baku aim to complete the Zangezur Corridor project by 2028–2029. Azerbaijan has repeatedly issued veiled threats toward Armenia should it obstruct the corridor’s development.

To mitigate tensions with Russia, Ankara and Baku invoke Clause 9 of the trilateral statement from November 9, 2020 — which, while not mentioning the term “Zangezur Corridor,” does call for unblocking all transportation links between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with Russian border guards monitoring the Armenian section. However, Turkey has little interest in expanding Russia’s military footprint within Armenia.

While Yerevan insists on preserving sovereignty over Syunik, it does not oppose unblocking transit routes through its territory, including Meghri. In October 2023, Armenia presented its own initiative — “Crossroads of Peace” — at the “Silk Road” international forum in Tbilisi.

Iran remains the chief opponent of the Zangezur Corridor in Syunik, fearing that Turkey could use it to expand its regional power through the pan-Turanic geopolitical and geoeconomic project. President Erdoğan himself acknowledged that the barrier to opening Zangezur lies not so much with Pashinyan, but with Iran’s categorical stance.

At the same time, Tehran seeks to use Armenian Syunik for its own international trade routes to Europe, especially as Western sanctions begin to ease. Iran is actively pursuing alternative transit options — Chinese and Indian alike — that would cross Iran, Armenia, Georgia, and the Black Sea en route to Europe.

After visiting Lachin to mark Azerbaijan's Independence Day on May 28, Erdoğan told Turkish media: "The Zangezur Corridor is not merely a land route between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. It is a new integration pathway connecting Turkey to the Turkic world. Its swift opening will strengthen the Caucasus's transportation and energy infrastructure."

The Turkish leader also called on Iran to support the peaceful realization of the Zangezur Corridor, from which Tehran stands to gain economically.

Yet on May 22, Iran's ambassador to Armenia, Mr. Mehdi Sobhani, once again ruled out any corridor that would compromise Armenia's sovereignty. Meanwhile, Russian Defense Minister Andrey Belousov has warned Yerevan about potential military escalation in southern Armenia, and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reaffirmed during his visit to Yerevan that ensuring Armenia's security remains a top priority in Moscow's bilateral agenda.

In 2022, Iran opened a consulate in Kapan, Syunik province. On June 2 of this year, France agreed to open a consulate general in Goris. Russia also plans to establish a diplomatic mission in southern Armenia. This indicates that Iran, France, and Russia are unwilling to cede Syunik to Turkey or Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" project could be integrated into Russia's North-South International Transport Corridor (ITC), providing a structured route through Iran to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. As part of a new bilateral agreement, Armenia and Russia could also arrange for joint security guarantees along Armenian transit routes.

Proactive diplomacy aimed at relaunching Armenian-Russian relations at this stage may help prevent a dangerous deterioration in regional security across the South Caucasus. In resolving the conflict in Ukraine, Russia has no intention of abandoning other parts of the post-Soviet space or exposing its national interests to external threats. This is a message worth pondering in southern capitals still clinging to grand geopolitical hopes.

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