The Role of Turkey and Azerbaijan in Asian-European Transport Corridors

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Abstract

Major developments have been experienced in Eurasia since the early 1990s. The Soviet Union has disintegrated, new independent countries have been established in Central Asia, the European Union has expanded, China, India and South Asian economies have grown very rapidly. Increasing trade and economic relations between the countries of Europe, Central Asia and East Asia necessitated the creation of new Eurasian land corridors as an alternative to conventional maritime transportation that would allow access from Europe to China and South Asia. For this purpose, four major transport corridors between Europe and Asia, backed by the EU and the United Nations, have been identified. In this study, concepts of transportation, transportation networks, transport corridors are described, the role of transport corridors between Europe and Asia is discussed, and Turkey and Azerbaijan's role in these corridors is investigated and debated. The triggering point and the basic source of this debate has been based on a scrutinized review of the relevant literature.

Keywords: Turkey, Azerbaijan, Transport Corridors, Asia, Europe

1.Introduction

While trade of goods and services is the first factor that links countries economically (Daniels and Lee, 1998; 159), another factor is the existence of transportation facilities. The rapid and inexpensive transportation facilities that emerged after the Industrial Revolution have shortened the distances between countries and ensured the participation within the communities that were not a part of the global society in the global system. Since the early 1990s, political developments that supported the free market economy, the withdrawal of customs tariffs, and limitations on government incentives and other restrictions that may hamper trade have strengthened the efforts made to reduce the barriers to international trade. In particular, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the membership of the People's Republic of China to the World Trade Organization, and the European Union's transition to the common currency as well as increasing the number of its member states, has led to the creation of new economic areas around the world (TUSIAD, 2007; 33). Besides, the striking economic developments of the Chinese, Indian and South Asian economies, the large energy resources of Central Asian countries and their strategic location in East-West trade have enabled them to become once again active geographies within the global economy. Increasing trade and economic relations between the countries of Europe, Central Asia and East Asia has necessitated the creation of new land corridors as an alternative to conventional maritime transportation that would allow access from Europe to China and South Asia (Akıncı, 2013).

As a response to this commonly admitted necessity, four transport corridors have been created under the auspices of the United Nations and the European Union in order to meet connection needs of the emerging European Asian land. Among these, the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) corridor is supported by the European Union, while the land corridors such as Transsiberia Corridor, North-South Corridor and Asia-Europe South Corridor are supported by the United Nations. Turkey is located on TRACECA and Asia-Europe South corridor, whereas Azerbaijan is located on the TRACECA and North-South Corridor. Due to its geographical location, availability of its access to seas and ports, the transport networks it is located on, and increasing trade volume in East-West and North-South axes, Turkey is transforming into being a potential transportation center among countries in Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean countries. On the other hand, Azerbaijan is a transit hub in the Caspian region in the center of East-West and North-South axes.

The first section of this study will focus on the concepts of transportation, transport networks and transport corridors. Then, Europe-Asia transport corridors and the places of Azerbaijan and Turkey in these corridors will be examined.

2. Concept of "Transportation"

Transportation includes the process of changing the location of persons or goods in an economical, fast, and reliable manner to create value (DPT, 2004), transferring one thing from one place to another (Pekdemir, 1991; 6), the movement of goods and people between two points (Johnson et al., 1998; 173;Barda, 1982; 1), and the physical transfer of cargo from the point of origin to the destination point while taking into account the price that the customer has agreed to pay and the speed and safety aspects the customer demands (Stopford, 1988, 6).
A transport expert from Australia describes the importance of transport for countries in his book published in 1955 as follows: *"There are three things that make a country great and prosperous: fertile lands, employment opportunities, and the ease of moving people and objects from one place to another"* (Barda, 1982: 1). Transport establishes a link between production, storage and consumption points. By combining geographically disparate production facilities and markets, it helps to close spatial divisions in the logistics system (Bowersox, 1974; 137) and adds place utility to goods (Kasilingam, 1998; 1). Transportation is a basic convenience in utilizing and developing economic resources at national and international scales; and it enables the transport of raw materials and finished products from lower usage areas to higher usage areas (Branch, 1988; 19).

The demand of raw materials in large quantitites starting with the industrial revolution created structural changes in other economic activities, particularly agriculture and mining; and the age of mass-production and consumption, and depending upon these major transport activities began. However, in order for transport activities to develop, the industry had to develop first (Tümertekin and Özgüç, 1999; 551). Although the basis for the development of transportation is based on the industrial revolution, transportation activities have been accelerated considerably by liberalization of trade, the formation of economic blocks and the more efficient use of global workforce and other resources in the second half of the 20th century to create comparative advantage (Rodrigue, 2005;1).

The most important factors in the development of local and international markets are the technological changes in transportation and communication, and the development of transport networks that increase spatial interaction. In terms of emphasizing their importance in development, *"transportation networks are not different from blood vessels, in a sense, and the communication system is not so different from the nervous system"* (Atasoy, 1987; 7).
In international competition, transportation services have become one of the key factors in terms of quantity and quality. Entering new markets requires reliable, inexpensive and fast delivery systems with high standards. In recent years, the globalization movement in the global economy has not only been affected by the liberalization of foreign trade policies; the fundamental advances and discoveries in the storage, communication and transportation sectors also have made significant contributions (Kaynak, 2003; 1).

3. Concept of "Transportation network" and "Corridors"

A transport network is made up of a number of individual roads connecting two or more centers. In addition to natural conditions, economic, strategic and social reasons play a major role in the selection of these locations (Tümertekin and Özgüç, 1999, 556).

Transport corridor refers to a line which has a continuous load flow over it, and which carries this load by at least two modes of transport including the transport line and transport infrastructure (INLOC, 2004; 5). Kondratowicz (2003; 9) defines a transport corridor as a route through which a significant load flow is transported by a combination of different modes of transport. UNECE/UNESCAP (2004) defines the concept of the international transport corridor as: a network of main transport systems linking the parties, adequately equipped to carry out various transport modes, which in principle ensure the international carriage of goods and passengers in the most concentrated directions. Transport corridors have two important features (Kişi et al., 2005; 232):

1. Corridors are primarily the center of international exchanges (axes) between regions or countries. In other words, the corridor combines different routes into the same system, sometimes as part of a local network.
2. Most often, the corridor is a multimodal axis including intermodal change points (ports, airports, intermodal centers) and offering alternate maritime and air transport options.

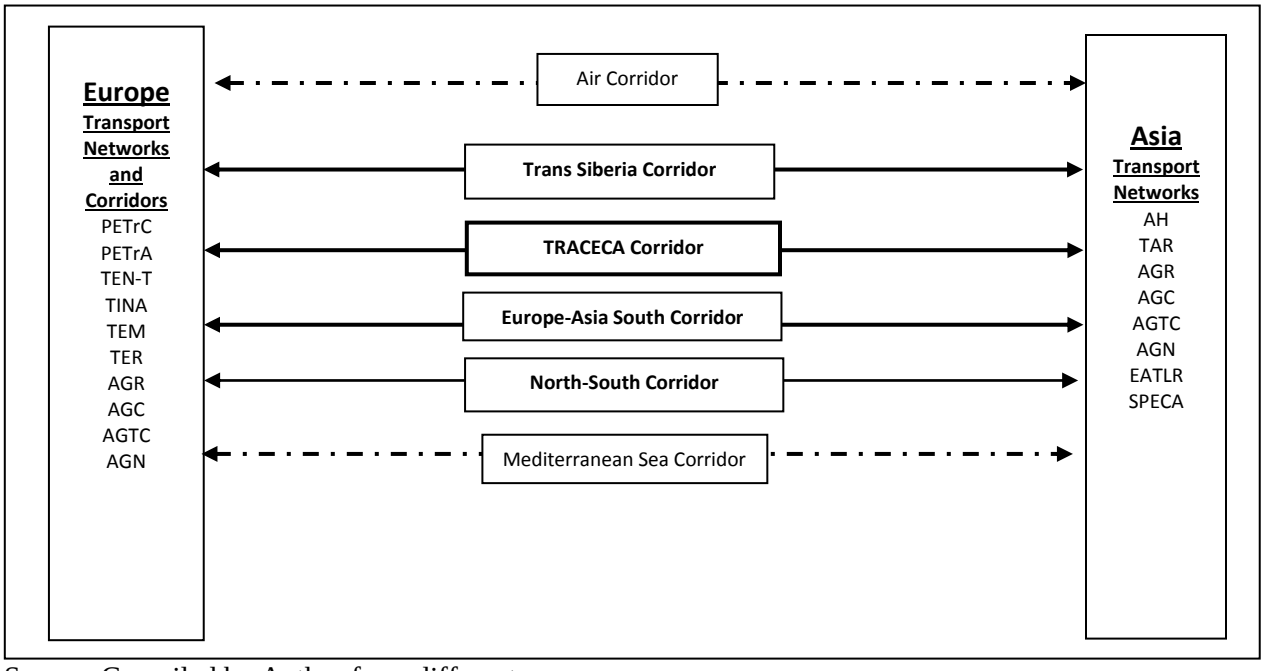
As can be understood from the above definitions, international transport corridors seem to cover much wider territories and countries. They are formed in ways that connect not just two or more cities, but to connect the transport networks of many countries. Due to these characteristics, inter-country relations play an important role in the formation of corridors. In addition, physical (geographical), economic and strategic factors are also effective in the formation of corridors. When we consider corridors as a new generation of infrastructure facilities, it appears that they are often located around old trade routes and sometimes on older systems (in cases of renovation). For example, the currently widely discussed European-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) corridor is an extension of the historical Silk Road (Tümertekin and Özgüç, 1999; 557).

4.Eurasian Land Corridors

Increasing trade between European and Asian countries has revealed the intention to connect and integrate the transport system of these countries. This intention was first expressed at the International Eurasian Transport Conference in St. Petersbug in 1998. This intention was subsequently put into effect after the declarations in 2000 and 2003 (UNECE-ESCAP, 2008: 15). In this context, it has been determined that the main regions of Asia should be linked to Pan-European transport corridors (EATLR, 2015).

In 2000, UNECE (the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) and UNESCAP (United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and The Pacific) have put forward the vision of the European-Asian Transport link in the Second International Europe-Asia Transport Conference. This vision was modified and reorganized in 2001 by the Committee of Land Transport of the UNECE. In the Europe-Asia Transport link First Experts Group meeting, the following four main European-Asian transport corridors were defined as part of the UNECE/UNESCAP strategic vision (UNECE/UNESCAP, 2004; 2). Four main corridors available on existing transport networks in Europe and Asia were included in this project (Figure 1).

Figure 1. European-Asian Transport Corridors



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(AH: Asia Highway, TAR: Trans-Asian Railway Network, AGR: E-Highway Network, AGC: E-Railway Network, AGTC: E-Combined Transportation Network, AGN: European Inland Waterways Network, TEM: Trans-Europe North South Highway Project, TER: Trans-Europe Railway Project, TEN-T: EU, Trans-European Transport Networks, PETrC: Pan-European Transport Corridors, PETrA: Pan-European Transport Areas, TINA: European Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment Commission, TRACECA: Europe - Caucasus - Asia Transport Corridor, EATLR: Europe-Asia Transport Connection Routes, SPECA: United Nations Special Program for Economies of Central Asia)

These four corridors and routes are as follows (UN ECE – ESCAP,2004; 2):

1. Transsiberian Corridor: Europe (PETC 2, 3 and 9) - Russian Federation - Japan,
The corridor is divided into three sub-corridors from the Russian Federation:

- Russian Federation - Kazakhstan - China
- Russian Federation - Korean Peninsula; and
- Russian Federation - Mongolia - China

2.TRACECA Corridor: Eastern Europe (PETC 4, 7, 8, 9) - over the Black Sea - Caucasus - over the Caspian Sea - Central Asia

3. Europe-Asia South Corridor: South East Europe (PETC 4) - Turkey – Iran
The corridor is divided into two sub-corridors in Iran:

- Iran - Central Asia - China
- Iran - South Asia - South East Asia / South China

4. North - South Corridor: Northern Europe (PETC 9) - Russian Federation The corridor is divided into three sub-corridors from the Russian Federation:

- Russian Federation - Caucasus - Persian Gulf
- Russian Federation - Central Asia - Persian Gulf
- Russian Federation - Caspian Sea - Iran - Persian Gulf

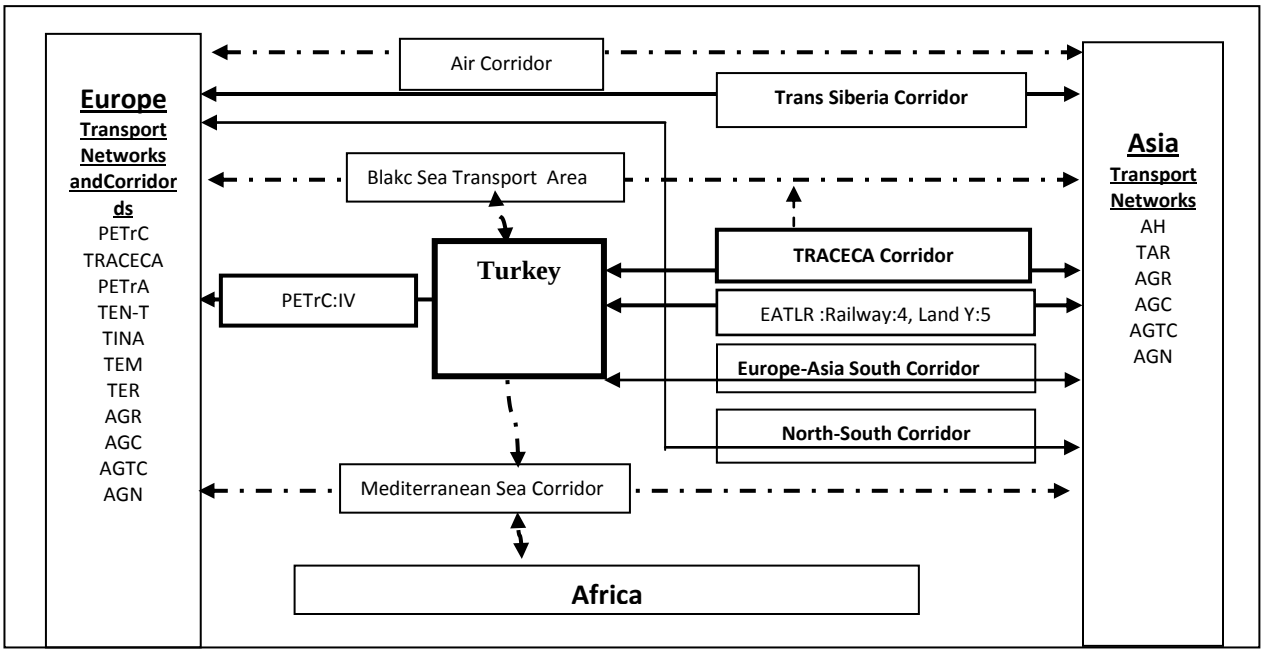
The designated corridors are located on the transportation networks and corridors existing in Asia and Europe. The corridors include the Asia Highway (AH), the Trans-Asian Railway Network (TAR), the United Nations Special Program for Central Asian Economies (SPECA), and the Asian sections of E-Highway Network (AGR), E-Railway Network (AGC), E-Combined Transportation Network (AGTC), European Inland Waterways Networks (AGN) and the Euro-Asian Transport Link Roads (EATLR). The European section of the corridors includes the Pan-European Transport Corridors (PETrC), the EU, Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T), the Pan-European Transport Areas (PETrA), the Trans-Europe North South Highway Project (TEM), Trans-Europe Railway Project (TER), E-Highway Network (AGR), E-Railway Network (AGC), E-Combined Transport Network (AGTC), European Inland Waterways Networks (AGN) and TINA: European Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment Commission network and corridors.

5. The Role of Turkey in Transport Networks

Geographically located at the intersection of Asia, Europe and Africa, Turkey has a position that enables links and connections between countries in both the east-west and north-south axes. Its location, the corridors passing through the country, the seas surrounding Turkey, the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and the harbors put Turkey in a position of significant importance in terms of an intercontinental logistics base or logistics hub (Doğaka, 2014; 1).

Turkey is located on only two of the four main transport corridors planned on the Asian-European axis. These corridors are the Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) transport corridor and the Europe-Asia South Corridor. Besides the main transport corridors, one railway, and one highway line as part of the Europe-Asia Transportation Connection Roads pass through Turkey. Transsiberia corridor and North-South corridors do not pass through Turkey. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Transport Corridors Passing Through Turkey



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Corridors passing through Turkey are built on the existing transport networks in Turkey. These networks are AH and TAR Asian networks and AGR, AGC, AGCT, TEM and TER European networks. The four main corridors that are created are linked with Pan European Transport corridors in Europe. These corridors were built with a purpose of collaboration with Central and Eastern European countries and neighboring countries by the European Community believing that the completion of the single market in the European Union, and the creation of the European Economic Area (EEA) is possible through the development of transport systems and a transport network that includes other Europ countries (Karataş, 2004). Within the context of the Pan-European Transport Conferences ten transport corridors have been identified and appropriate infrastructural plans have been developed. Turkey is directly connected to this corridor via the No. 4 corridor (DPT, 2006; 36). Turkey is also connected with the No. 10 Pan-Europe transport corridor via the Nis-Sofia-Istanbul secondary line.

Outside the main corridors, Turkey is also a part of the Black Sea Transport Area (PETrA). There are 44 ports in the area. Ports of Antalya, Gemlik, Hopa, Istanbul, Izmir, Kocaeli (Izmit), Samsun and Trabzon are part of the area (Pan-Eurostar, 2006; 72). Turkey is also a part of Motorways of the Sea (MoS). Samsun and Mersin ports are included in the map of MoS (UNECE-UNESCAP, 2006; 3). Other international transport corridors that Turkey is part of are Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and the South East European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) corridors (Karataş and Oral, 2007).

The first of the two corridors that Turkey is part of is the TRACECA corridor. This corridor, TRACECA, is an intergovernmental program aimed at improving international transport and political-economic progress in the Black Sea, Caucasus and Central Asia. This project is an East-West Corridor based on intermodal transportation that extends throughout the Black Sea, allowing the resources of the Caucasus and Central Asian republics to reach the west and European products to these countries (Seçkin, 2013). The European Association provides financial support for the implementation of the project.

Although TRACECA corridor can initially be seen as a project that excludes Turkey, after being accepted to full membership in 2002, Turkey has taken its place in the TRACECA map. The corridor starts from Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine), covers Turkey and goes through the Black Sea to the ports of Poti and Batumi in Georgia, then crosses the South Caucasus transport networks, thereby connecting this region to Turkey by road. TRACECA connects Caspian ferries (Baku-Turkmenbashi, Baku, Aktau) via Azerbaijan, to the railway networks of Central Asian states of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The transport networks of these countries end in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and reach the border with China and Afghanistan (TRACECA, 2012). Turkey conducts studies and initiatives on its transport potential to support the TRACECA project, giving priority to the elimination of the experienced bottlenecks on international traffic and border crossings, implementing many projects for this purpose including the Marmaray, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, high-speed train projects, double road constructions, the Black Sea Coastal Highway, the second sub-sea tunnel in Istanbul and the establishment of a logistics center in the country (Çetin, 2008). The project, called "Silk Railway" since it will revive the historical "Silk Road" in the railway networks, will be connected to the European railway network by the Marmaray railway tunnel passing through the Bosphorus in the west and to Kazakhstan and China railway lines in the east. Once the project is completed, a train setting off in Britain will be able to travel nonstop to China (Şensoy, 2007).

Within the scope of the TRACECA corridor, there are 12 ports, 34 railway and/or highway lines, many railway-ferry and Ro-Ro lines in the Caspian Sea and Black Sea, 37 highways and 27 railway border crossing points. The ports of Samsun and Istanbul, and Istanbul-Batumi/Gyumri highway and Istanbul-Sivas-Kars/Gyumri railway lines are included in the infrastructure system on the corridor.

Owing to the TRACECA Program, it will be possible for some of the trade between European markets and Central Asian countries to be conducted via railways and highways through Turkey, as well as the traffic coming from Caucasus and Central Asian countries to be transported to Western Europe and the Mediterranean basin through Turkey.

Another important corridor passing through Turkey is the Europe-Asia South Corridor. This corridor is supported by the United Nations. It connects South China and South East Asia to the Pan-European Transport Corridor through Turkey via railways and highways (UN ECE - ESCAP, 2008; 2).

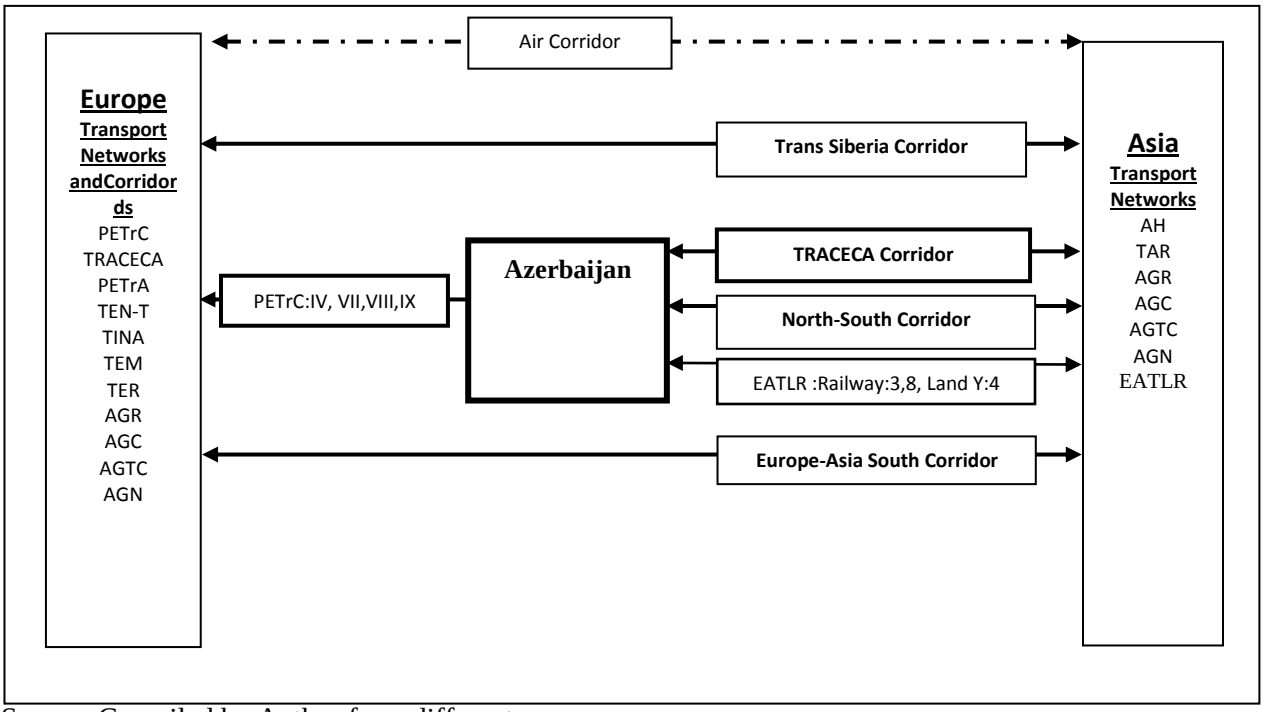
Despite the geographical location of Turkey as a transit country between Europe and Asia, neighboring countries such as Russia and Iran, due to their geographical location, have created alternative corridors to Turkey in the east-west and north-south trade routes. Russia, wanting to take a share from the trade made in China from Europe which has increased significantly in recent years, has created the concept of Trans-Siberia on the east-west line, which is predominantly railroad-oriented. On the other hand, Iran has created the North-South corridor with Russia and India (St. Petersburg-Caspian Sea-Iran-India) thereby creating an alternative to the Suez Canal for goods coming from Asia and going to Europe (Karataş and Oral, 2007). After the establishment of the North-South Corridor Coordination Council in 2003, it is expected that the connection of Bombay, India to the port of Olya in the Caspian Sea through Bander Abbas Port in Iran will be accelerated. If this corridor becomes operational, the duration of the voyage will be shortened by 10 to 12 days compared to the traditional route over the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal (UNECE - UNESCAP, 2006; 3).

Turkey, thanks to its coasts to Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Seas, its control of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and its bulk cargo and container terminals, has the ability to connect to all the ports of the world. With this capability, Turkey will enable Caucasian and Central Asian countries to gain access to international markets.

6. Role of Azerbaijan in Transport Corridors

Due to its geographical location, Azerbaijan is a transit distribution hub where two main transport corridors intersect. The country is located on the TRACECA network on one side, and on the North-South Corridor on the other side. In addition to the main corridors, Azerbaijan is also part of the European-Asian Transport Connection Roads. No. 3 and 8 railways and No. 4 highway corridors pass through the country. See Figure 3. The country is not a part of Trans-Siberia and the Europe-Asia South Corridor.

Figure 3. Transport Corridors Passing Through Azerbaijan



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Azerbaijan is one of the important actors of the TRACECA project. The country is located on the shortest transit point between Europe and Asia in the TRACECA corridor. Azerbaijan is connected to Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria from the ports of Poti and Batum of Georgia through the Black Sea. On the other hand, after the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars rail connection, it is also connected to Turkey. With Marmaray and Eurasia Highway Sub-Sea Transit, it is connected to Pan European Transport corridors. Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway connection also has the potential to create a transport corridor between Russia and Turkey. This railway line will also connect Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan (Şensoy, 2007). Azerbaijan is also integrated with the world through Trabzon and Samsun ports in the Black Sea, and Mersin and İskenderun ports in the Mediterranean. Another important corridor on which Azerbaijan is located is the North-South Corridor. TRACECA and GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova) organizations, which developed regional infrastructure and transit routes, have excluded Iran and Russia from these projects, Iran, Russia and India formed the North-South Corridor in 2000 (Spector, 2002). Azerbaijan has an important role in this corridor as well as in the TRACECA corridor. Transport networks in the western section of the corridor pass through Azerbaijan. This corridor is the shortest in the North-South corridor (Ziyadov, 2012). Azerbaijan was involved in this agreement in 2005. The same year, Azerbaijan held a tripartite discussion on the design, construction and operation of the Qazin-Rasht-Astara railway between Iran and Russian Railways. In addition, a joint company was established during these discussions for the design of Astara (Azerbaijan) and Astara (Iran) railway (ADY, 2015).

In the Azerbaijan section of North-South Corridor, railway transportation is predominantly carried out. Projects are being developed with other member countries to rehabilitate the railways and motorways on the corridor (North-South, 2015). Iran, which wants to have an effective transportation market in the Middle East and Caucasus within the scope of the North-South corridor, wants to take Central Asia transportation to the north-south axis.

For this purpose, Sarakhs (Turkmenistan)-Meşhet (Iran) railway line was completed by Iran and a connection with Central Asian countries was established. In addition to these developments, Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran have signed an agreement on the construction of the Kazvin-Reşt-Enzeli-Astara Railway Line within the "North-South" International Transportation Corridor. The project aims to connect Tehran to Russia via Azerbaijan (and to Europe to a certain extent by bypassing Turkey) (Şensoy, 2007).

Although Azerbaijan is perceived as an inland country with no coasts, it is a country connected to international markets via the Caspian Sea through Volga-Don and Volga-Baltic channels (EATLR, 2004). Azerbaijan is one of the 5 Caspian countries actively engaged in the maritime activities in the Caspian Sea. There are 10 main ports beside small ports in the Caspian Sea. Differently from open sea ports, these ports are designed to serve as distribution centers where intermodal changes can take place. These ports are the transit points that provide Eurasian links in the region (Ziyadov, 2012).

Baku port is the oldest port in the region. It dates back to 1564 and is the largest port of Azerbaijan in this region. Ports and terminals of Azerbaijan handled 21% of the cargoes in the Caspian region in 2010. 80% of the trade in Azerbaijani ports is made up of transit freight. In the Baku Ferry terminal, 82% of the handling is made up of transit freights. These freights consist of loads within the context of the TRACECA corridor. Azerbaijan carries out maritime activities in the Caspian Sea with two ship fleets belonging to the operating companies of CASPAR and SOCAR (Ziyadov, 2012).

Another point that is believed to make a significant contribution to the Eurasia connection next to the port of Baku is the Alyat International Logistics Center. This facility is not only a multimodal transport pick-up-distribution point, but also a consolidation, distribution and value-added services point. This facility serves South Caucasus, central Iran, Iran, Turkey and southern Russia (Ziyadov, 2012). The center is connected to Caspian ports via sea and from there to Central Asian countries, to Turkey, Georgia and Iran via railways and highways, and to the world market via Baku airport.

7. Conclusion

Major developments have been experienced in Eurasia since the early 1990s. The Soviet Union has disintegrated, new independent countries have been established in Central Asia, the European Union has expanded, China, India and South Asian economies have grown very rapidly. Increasing trade and economic relations between the countries of Europe, Central Asia and East Asia has necessitated the creation of new Eurasian land corridors as an alternative to conventional maritime transportation that would allow access from Europe to China and South Asia. To this end, four major transport corridors between the EU and Asia, backed by the EU and the United Nations, have been identified.

The need for Europe to access the natural resources of Central Asian countries and deliver their products to these emerging markets in an economical, quick and safe manner has created the TRACECA (European-Caucasus-Asia) transport corridor idea. This EU-funded project connects Europe to Georgia and Azerbaijan via the Black Sea and Turkey, and from there to Central Asia and Chinese border through the Caspian Sea. Moreover, this project is an alternative to the Transsiberia project.

Iran and Russia, which were not included in the TRACECA project, have developed an alternative project to bring Asian cargoes to Europe and have brought forth the North-South corridor idea with India. The corridor starts from the Persian Gulf and crosses the eastern and western coasts of the Caspian Sea and reaches North Europe through Russia. This corridor is an alternative route for freight to be transported by sea to Europe via Suez. With this project, Iran seeks to increase its presence in the region, and Turkey is excluded from this project. Thanks to its geographical position, Azerbaijan constitutes an important part of the project.

The Transsiberia project is a project that Russia has developed to bring cargoes of East and Central Asia directly to Europe through its borders. This project extends from Europe to Japan. Almost the entire corridor passes through Russia. Turkey and Azerbaijan are located quite to south of this corridor. In this corridor, Turkey and Iran have a significant importance as a bridge and distribution point, respectively. Turkey, in the TRACECA and Europe-Asia corridors it is located on, plays the role of a natural bridge connecting Europe and Asia. In the north, Caucasus will be connected to Europe via Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and in the south the Iranian railroad will be connected to Europe via the Marmaray in the west, and the Turkey section of the Silk Road will be completed. Turkey will also be a gateway for Central Asian countries thanks to its ports in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

Due to its geographical location, Azerbaijan is a transit distribution hub where two main transport corridors intersect. The country is located on the TRACECA network on one side, and the North-South Corridor on the other side. Azerbaijan is located on the shortest route in both corridors. This creates a great advantage for Azerbaijan on the route that transit cargoes will flow. Particularly in the TRACECA corridor, the port of Baku has a strategic importance for the Caspian Sea transit. After the completion of the road and rail infrastructure in the western part of the North-South corridor, Azerbaijan will have a strategic role in this corridor as well.

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