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2019 წლის მიწურულსა და 2020 წლის დასაწყისში პანდემიასთან დაკავშირებულმა მოვლენებმა, რასაც შედეგად მოჰყვა, გლობალურად, მსოფლიო ქვეყნების საზღვრების ჩაკეტვა, ადგილი ჰქონდა საზღვაო ტვირთების გადაადგილების გარკვეულ შეფერხებებს. მოცემულ პირობებში, რიგი ქვეყნებისათვის, ერთადერთ ხსნად სახმელეთო სატრამსპორტო საშულებები იქცა, რამაც კვლავ გააცოცხლა ინტერესი სახმელეთო სატრანსპორტო დერეფნების მიმართ.

ერთ-ერთ ასეთ სატრანსპორტო დერეფანს წარმოადგენს „ევროპა-კავკასია-აზიის სატრანსპორტო დერეფანი", რომელიც დაარსების დღიდან დღემდე არ ფუნქციონირებდა სრული დატვირთვით, თუმცა აქვს მომავალი განვითარების დიდი პოტენციალი, რისი ნათელი მაგალითებიც არის მოცემული დერეფნის ფარგლებში წარმატებით განხორციელებული ისეთი მნიშვნელოვანი პროექტები, როგორიცაა „ბაქო-თბილისი-ჯეიჰანის" (BTC) ნავთობსადენი, „ბაქო-თბილისი-ერზრუმის" (BTE) გაზსადენი და „ბაქო-თბილისი-ყარსის" (BTK) სარკინიგზო მაგისტრალი, რაც მნიშვნელოვნად ზრდის დერეფნის გეოპოლიტიკურ მნიშვნელობას.

მოცემული ნაშრომის მიზანია „ევროპა-კავკასია-აზიის სატრანსპორტო დერეფნის" მნიშვნელობის, შესაძლებლობების და ასევე შესაძლო განვითარების გზებისა და პერსპექტივების განსაზღვრა, რეგიონში მიმდინარე პროცესებთან მიმართებაში. კვლევის მიზანია აღწეროს ევრაზიის რეგიონში მიმდინარე გეოპოლიტიკური და ეკონომიკური პროცესები და გამოკვეთოს „ევროპა-კავკასია-აზიის სატრანსპორტო დერეფნის" ძლიერი და სუსტი მხარეები.

აღნიშნული კვლევის ორიგინალურობა და ღირებულება მდგომარეობს „ევროპა-კავკასია-აზიის სატრანსპორტო დერეფნის" არსებული მდგომარეობის შესწავლაში, მის კონკურენტუნარიანობის განსაზღვრაში სხვა ალ-

ტერნატიულ სატრანსპორტო დერეფნებთან მიმართებაში და ასევე არსებული და პოტენციური პერსპექტივების გამოვლენასა და მათი მიღწევის გზების განსაზღვრაში.

კვლევის მიზნების მისაღწევად გამოყენებულ იქნა ინფორმაციის მოპოვების კომპლექსური მეთოდები. ბიბლიოგრაფიული კვლევით განხორციელდა მეორადი მონაცემების მოპოვება, დახარისხება და ანალიზი. კვლევის თეორიული საფუძველია მოცემულ საკითხზე არსებული ლიტერატურა: სამეცნიერო შრომები, კვლევები, პუბლიკაციები, პერიოდული ბეჭდვითი გამოცემების სტატიები, ინტერნეტით მოძიებული მონაცემები.

ნაშრომში განხილულია „ევროპა-კავკასია-აზიის სატრანსპორტო დერეფნის“ მომავალი განვითარებისა და სრული დატვირთვით ფუნქციონირების პერსპექტივები ევროკავშირისა და ცენტრალური აზიის ქვეყნებს შორის სავაჭრო ურთიერთობების გაღრმავებისა და ტვირთბრუნვის გაზრდის შედეგად.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ევრაზია; ცენტრალური აზია; ტრასეკა; სატრანსპორტო დერეფნები

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STEPS, CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "EUROPE-CAUCASUS-ASIA TRANSPORT CORRIDOR" (TRACECA)

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Pandemic-related events in late 2019 and early 2020, which resulted in the closure of world borders globally, led to certain delays in the movement of maritime cargo. Under these conditions, for a number of countries, land transport has become the only solution, which has revived interest in land transport corridors.

One such transport corridor is the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", which has not operated at its full capacity since its inception, but has great potential for future development, as exemplified by such important projects as "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan" (BTC) oil pipeline, the "Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum" (BTE) gas pipeline and the "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars" (BTK) railway, which significantly increase the geopolitical importance of the corridor.

The aim of this thesis is to determine the importance, opportunities and possible development paths and perspectives of the "Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia" in relation to the ongoing processes in the region. The aim of the study is to describe the current geopolitical and economic processes in the Eurasian region and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia.

The originality and value of this study lies in the study of the current state of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", its competitiveness in relation to other alternative transport corridors, as well as the identification of existing and potential perspectives and the ways to achieve them.

Complex methods of obtaining information were used to achieve the objectives of the study. Bibliographic research was used to extract, sort and analyze secondary data. The theoretical basis of the research is the existing literature on the subject: scientific papers, studies, publications, articles in periodicals, data retrieved from the Internet.

The thesis discusses the prospects for the future development and full-fledged operation of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor" as a result of deepening trade relations and increasing freight traffic between the EU and Central Asian countries.

Key words: *Eurasia; Central Asia; TRACECA; Transport corridors*

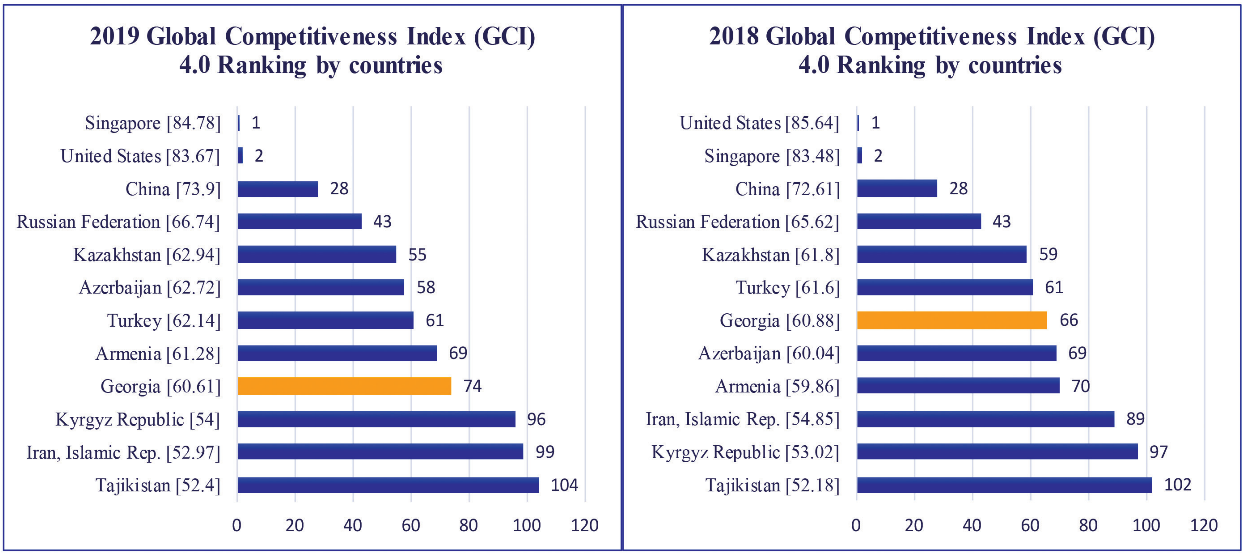
There are many initiatives, economic associations and routes in the Eurasian region today, such as the "Belt and Road Initiative", the "Eurasian Economic Union", the "North-South International Transport Corridor", the "Lapis Lazuli Corridor" and others which aim to promote transport corridors and at the same time economic development.

All of the above transport corridors are competing corridors of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", but this is especially true of the "North-South International Transport Corridor" and transport corridors within the "Eurasian Economic Union". The "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Lapis Lazuli Corridor" does not rule out Georgia's involvement in the transport economic corridor, which we cannot say about the "Eurasian Economic Union" and the "North-South International Transport Corridor". The main challenges of all the above projects remain the underdevelopment and low quality of logistics infrastructure, and in the case of the "North-South International Transport Corridor" and the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", all this is compounded by the abundance of intermodal operations, which significantly increases transport costs as well as delivery times.

It should also be noted that the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor" and its most recent achievement, the "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars" Railway, could be harmed by the new infrastructure projects that are to be implemented between Azerbaijan and Iran, aimed at the construction of new railway sections and the expressway between the two countries[1] [2].

According to the World Economic Forum 2019 Global Competitiveness Index, Georgia ranks 74th among 141 countries in the world. As the chart below shows, Georgia ranks last in the Caucasus region. It is noteworthy that the 2019 Global Competitiveness Index of Georgia has significantly deteriorated compared to 2018, when Georgia was leading in the Caucasus region.

Chart N1- 2019 and 2018 Global Competitiveness Index



Source: (World Economic Forum, The Global Competitiveness Report, 2019)

Chart N3

Also, if we look at the infrastructure indicators of Turkey, Central Asia and the Caucasus countries participating in the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", we will see that they differ significantly in the degree of development. For example, Turkey and Azerbaijan are significantly ahead of the three Central Asian possible only between Georgia and Turkey (due to the fact that other countries landlocked) and here Georgia is significantly lower (92nd place) as compared to Turkey (28th place). For the above figures, see Table N1 and Chart N2 and N3 below. Chart N3 shows the quality of joint infrastructure development rate by country.

Chart N2 - According to the data of the World Economic Forum 2019, the indicators of the quality of road, railway and maritime infrastructure development by countries

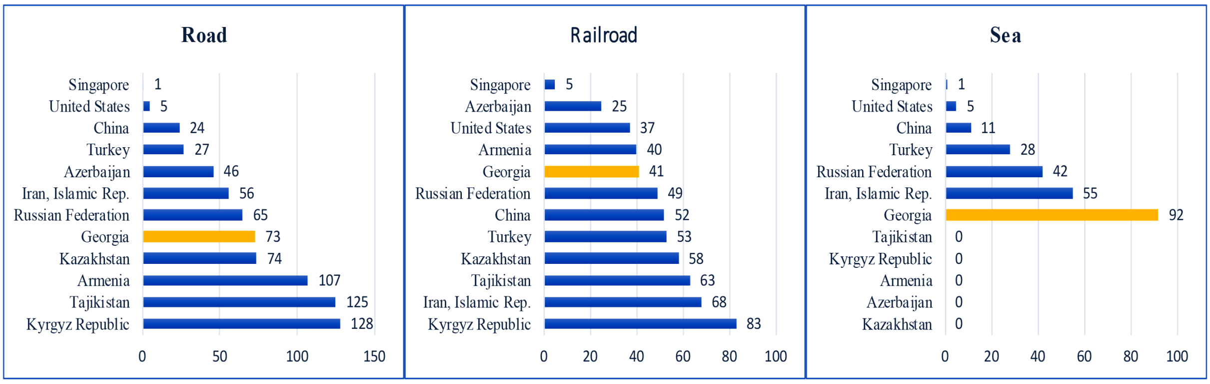
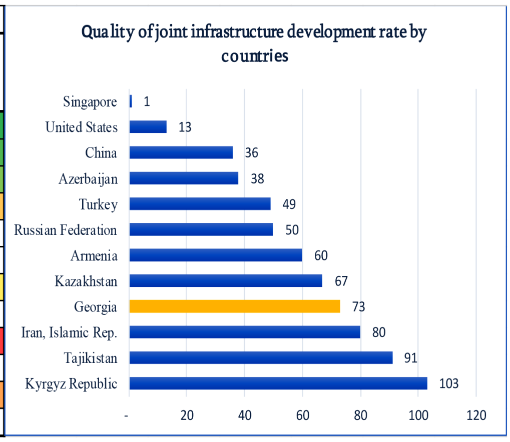


Table N1

Country	Quality of Infrastructure			
	Road	Railroad	Air	Sea
Singapore	1	5	3	1
United States	5	37	4	5
China	24	52	21	11
Russian Federation	65	49	24	42
Kazakhstan	74	58	75	n/a
Azerbaijan	46	25	53	n/a
Turkey	27	53	12	28
Armenia	107	40	86	n/a
Georgia	73	41	82	92
Kyrgyz Republic	128	83	124	n/a
Iran, Islamic Rep.	56	68	85	55
Tajikistan	125	63	105	n/a

Chart N3



Source: (World Economic Forum, The Global Competitiveness Report, 2019)

countries, Georgia and Armenia in terms of road infrastructure (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not included in the World Economic Forum study). In terms of railway infrastructure, the Caucasus countries are significantly ahead of Central Asian countries, while in the case of maritime infrastructure, comparisons are

The World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (LPI) is also used to determine the development of the logistics and transport sector, which is a comprehensive summary of the various components of logistics and includes customs and border clearance procedures, ease of international shipping, trade and transport quality, criteria for control/monitoring of parcels, evaluation of delivery dates. The World Bank publishes these data every two years, and according to the latest data published in 2018, in the case of Georgia, there is a negative dynamic, which can be seen in the table below (see Table N2), where Georgia ranks 119th out of 160 countries and Germany ranks the first place[3].

is clear when comparing the components of the given index with Russia and Iran (see Chart N4).

Despite the above negative indicators related to the deterioration of the logistical indicators of the member states of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor" (TRACECA -Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia [4]), which fails to meet the current needs and challenges,

Table N2 - Georgian Logistics Performance Index

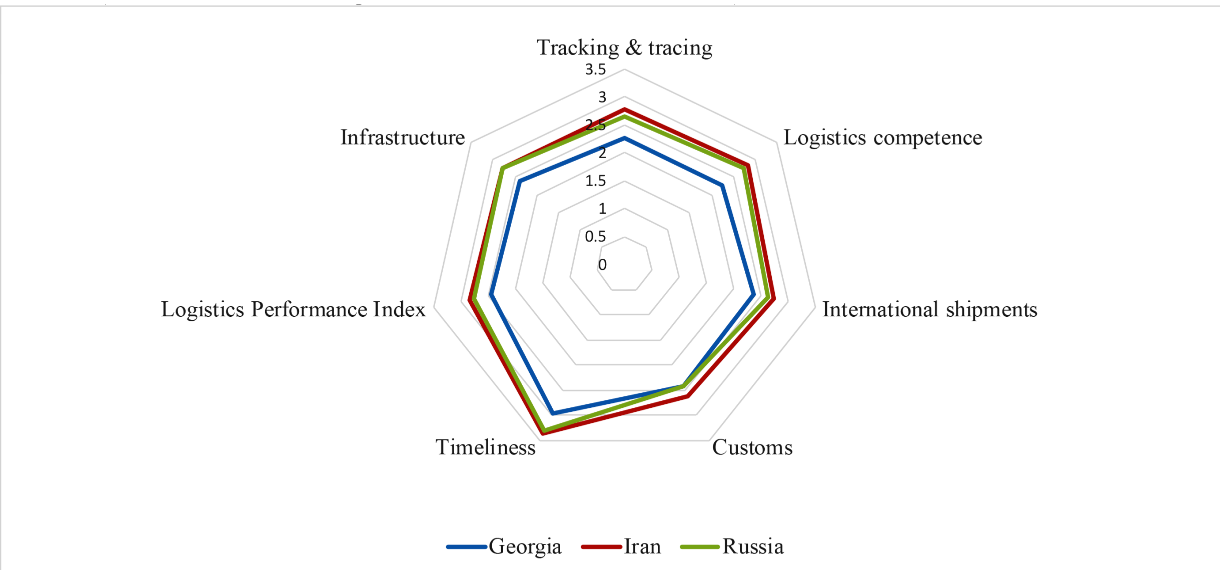
Georgia - Logistics Performance Index and its sub-components	Rank / Score	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Logistics Performance Index	Rank	93	77	116	130	119
Logistics Performance Index	Score	2.61	2.77	2.51	2.35	2.44
Tracking & tracing	Score	2.67	2.59	2.59	2.44	2.26
Logistics competence	Score	2.57	2.78	2.44	2.08	2.26
International shipments	Score	2.73	2.68	2.32	2.35	2.38
Customs	Score	2.37	2.9	2.21	2.26	2.42
Timeliness	Score	3.08	2.86	3.09	2.8	2.95
Infrastructure	Score	2.17	2.85	2.42	2.17	2.38

Source: (The World Bank, Logistics Performance Index, 2018)

It should be noted that according to the logistics performance index, the member states of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor" are located at significantly lower positions compared to competing transport countries such as Russia and Iran. In the case of Georgia, this

it should be noted that the corridor, which is part of the "Trans-Caspian International Trasnport Route" (TITR), also known as the "Middle Corridor", has recently seen some activity due to the activation of block trains from the China-Kazakhstan border to Georgia. The

Chart N4



Source: (The World Bank, Logistics Performance Index, 2018) share of cargo transported using this corridor in China-Central Asia-EU shipments is negligible. The main stopping factor for the development of the "Middle Corridor" is its high cost and unreliability, which is reflected in the fact that rail transport through the "Central Corridor" from Central Asia to EU countries is 22% more expensive and 50% longer than the route within "Eurasian Economic Union"[6].

No less important is the fact that the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor" is of regional importance for the Caucasus and Central Asia, supported by the EU and the US, which is reflected in technical and financial support, as this transport corridor is an important geopolitical project for them.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the three member countries of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", Georgia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, have successfully continued to expand economic cooperation, especially in the mega-projects of the transport and energy sectors, in which Central Asia countries are also participating. Three such large projects are the "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan" (BTC) oil pipeline, the "Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum" (BTE - so called "Shah Deniz") gas pipeline, and the "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars" (BTK) railway.

- The "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan" (BTC) oil pipeline, backed by Western companies led by British Petroleum (BP), was commissioned in 2005. It is Azerbaijan's "main export pipeline", through which crude oil is also exported from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan;
- The "Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum" (BTE) gas pipeline connects the source of Azerbaijan's natural gas field, Shah Deniz, with the Turkish city of Erzurum via Georgia. It is noteworthy that the EU facilitated the initiation of connecting Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan through the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline;
- "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars" (BTK) - Involvement of the Caucasus, in particular, Georgia and Azerbaijan (as a "Caucasian tandem"[7]) within the framework of the Silk Road project contributes to the successful implementation and completion of the "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars" (BTK) Railway (also known as the Iron Silk Road), which officially opened in October 2017 and connects three countries, namely Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, and which established the passenger and freight link between Europe and China, bypassing Russia and Armenia[8]. The annual capacity of this railway is determined by the transportation of 1 million passengers and 6.5 million tons of cargo, and by 2034 it is planned to increase these figures and the target is to transport 3 million passengers and 17 million tons of cargo.

Although economic cooperation between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey is quite strong, it should be noted that the third country in the Caucasus and one of the members of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", namely Armenia, is excluded from these economic relations due to political issues. As the latter has severed diplomatic relations with both Turkey and Azerbaijan and has open borders with only Iran and Georgia out of 4 neighboring countries. Armenia's economy and its stability are significantly linked to Russia, which is Armenia's largest importer. All trade operations with Russia are carried out by Armenia through the territory of Georgia. Armenia further deepened its economic integration with Russia in 2015 through membership in the "Eurasian Economic Union" (EAEU), which was driven by pressure from Russia and was a kind of response to the EU's ongoing cooperation with Armenia.

Another step forward is the "Trans-Caspian International Transport Route" initiative, which runs through China, Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, and then across the Black Sea to European countries. Delivery time from China to Europe within this route averages 14-15 days. The initiative was supported by both stakeholders and China, and the EU played an important role in creating the technical documentation.

The "Trans-Caspian International Transport Route" Development Coordination Committee was established in 2013 by Georgian, Azerbaijani and Kazakh transport companies, including "Georgian Railway", "Aktau International Seaport", "Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Company," "Azerbaijan Railway", "Baku International Sea Trade Port" and "Batumi Seaport". The activities of the Coordination Committee resulted in coordinated cooperation between transport companies in the field of technology and the approval of integrated rates for transportation[9].

There have also been positive shifts in the Caspian Sea section, which lies in the development and expansion of Baku International Seaport infrastructure. Within the framework of this project, the Government of Azerbaijan plans to turn the country into a logistics hub of the Caspian Sea, and effective steps have already been taken in this direction. The port infrastructure is being actively upgraded, and it is also planned to create a free economic zone, which will cover 400 hectares and where companies will benefit from significant tax benefits[10]. Also, no less important, Azerbaijan has put a regular feeder service on the Baku-Turkmenistan-Baku route, which will significantly reduce cargo handling, which until now has often been the case due to the lack of regular feeder service.

Clearly, all of the above will have a positive impact on the future effectiveness of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", as well as US-imposed sanctions on Iran and Russia are in favor of the corridor. Member states should make the most of it to their advantage.

Conclusion

The events of the first half of 2020, which were related to the pandemic declared by the World Health Organization and also the total closure of the world borders, showed how much the world economy is dependent on China, which led to a significant break in the previously functioning supply chain.

It is the abovementioned events that have led to the discussions within the developing countries regarding bringing back their manufacturing facilities and the relocation of their enterprises and multinational companies from China to other alternative markets, in order to maximize the risk diversification in case of such a situation in the future.

In our opinion, the above-mentioned alternative markets are the countries of Central Asia, and there are several explanations for this view, namely:

- Exporting enterprises from China to neighboring Central Asian countries is associated with lower costs;
- The economies of Central Asian countries are not well developed and diversified in

different economic sectors, and usually the whole economy is based on minerals and trade in natural resources. This circumstance makes the economies of Central Asian countries significantly vulnerable and their economic stability depends on the world market prices of natural resources (natural gas, fuel, etc.), which often fluctuate. It should also be noted that the resources given are usually exhaustible and non-renewable;

- Central Asian countries are interested in diversifying their economies and reducing the share of natural resources in total economic activity through the use of other economic sectors (typically more than 50% of the Central Asian economy comes from natural resources);
- Central Asian countries have a large amount of human resources that can be used in new economic activities and thus contribute to reducing labor migration (the population of Central Asian countries reaches 72 million people);

In our opinion, the transfer of production from the Chinese market to Central Asian countries will significantly contribute to the intensification of the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor", as no Central Asian country has access to the sea and most of the cargo produced will be destined for the EU, yet almost all Central Asian countries are members of the mentioned transport corridor. This is facilitated by the fact that the EU has developed a "New Central Asia Strategy" in 2019, under which the EU has already signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) with some parts of Central Asia (PCA - Cooperation and Partnership Agreement) agreements, some of which are in an active phase of negotiation.

In view of all the above and also on the condition that the implementation of new infrastructure projects within the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor" and the modernization of the existing ones continue, this will be compounded by the identification and development of competitive advantages by member country's state bodies, we can assume that the "Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor" will become a corridor with a significant advantage over the Eurasian continent.

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