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## GEOPOLITICS OF TRANSPORT CORRIDORS

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**Annotation:** The article presents study of issues related to the phenomenon of transport corridors. The topic, which has received sufficient reflection in the academic literature, still remains in demand, which is associated with the dynamism of the object of study itself. A poorly developed aspect of the problem is the geopolitical component of the processes of formation, formation and development of transport corridors. This article aims to fill this gap. In the presented work, the goal was to study the influence of geopolitical factors on the development of transport corridors, changes in their structure. As part of this goal, research was carried out in the following areas: the study of the nature of geopolitical factors, political motives for the creation, management and control of transport corridors. As a result, the author substantiates a qualitatively new level of complexity of the global geopolitical landscape, which determines the development of transport corridors. The article explores the processes of formation of two dialectically opposite trends: the "compression" of space due to an increase in the intensity and speed of communication and its "expansion" due to the integration of new territories into the global transport system. The article complements the content, which is aggregated around the urgent need for the formation of a new scientific discipline "geopolitics of transport".

**Key words:** transport corridor, politics, social, economic, aspects, connectography

### Research methods

A wide range of sources was involved in writing the article: materials from European structures and UN institutions, official websites of organizations, periodicals. The selection of factology, reflecting the research perspective defined in the article, required the use of the structural and functional principle of organizing the text of the work. The vision of the geopolitical background for the development of transport infrastructure in general and transport corridors (TC) in particular assumed a dialectical approach, which made it possible to present a contradictory process of integrating state, regional and global needs and interests in the space involved in the functioning of transport corridors.

### Researched problem in the scientific literature

There is no well-established definition of transport corridors in the scientific literature. Some researchers tend to characterize the TC as "a set of agreements aimed at changing the speed and direction of flow in a certain area" [Pynnöniemi, 2008].

Others, when describing transport corridors, focus on technical support (infrastructure and rolling stock). This approach dominates the definition of TC given at the pan-European conferences on transport

in 1993–1994: “The set of main transport communications (both existing and newly created) with the appropriate arrangement and infrastructure, connecting large transport hubs, within which various modes of transport are used, ensuring the transportation of passengers and goods in international traffic in the direction of their greatest concentration” [EDB. *Industry Review*, 2009: 20].

Specialists in the field of physical geography understand TC as the space “along the main direction of large-scale transportation of goods and passengers within or between agglomerations, including one or a network of parallel routes and transit roads with adjacent territories” [Corridor planning guide..., 2007: 11].

In Russian academic literature, the concept of TC is in circulation as a direction of “concentration of material financial and information flows”, “ensuring capital turnover and synchronization of the flow of goods, documents and money under preferential treatment” [Vardomsky, Turaeva, 2018: 9].

Representatives of legal science usually base their characterization of TCs (especially when it comes to international transport corridors) on the existence of an appropriate legal framework. Rules and agreements are fundamental in the characteristics of the TC contained in the UN documents. Transport corridor, as defined this organization is “a set of rules governing aspects of the transportation and transit of goods along a certain route, which are backed by an agreement signed by member countries”.

An attempt to combine all the above features contains the definition of the TC of the Inland Transport Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, one of the five regional organizations of ECOSOC: “A transport corridor is a part of a national or international transport system that provides significant international freight and passenger traffic between certain geographical areas, includes rolling stock and stationary devices of all types of transport operating in this direction, as well as a set of technological, organizational and legal conditions for the implementation of these transportations” [EDB. *Industry Review*, 2009: 6].

The content of this definition in the articulation of the World Bank is supplemented by the provision that the infrastructure and rolling stock included in the TC are coordinated by “national and international regional bodies” and their operation facilitates “trade and transport flows between the centers of economic activity and international trade” [Roberts, Melecky, Bougna, 2018: 2].

Summarizing the experience of conceptualizing the concept of “transport corridors”, the authors of the analytical report of the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences proposed their own version of the definition of the TC as “the coordinated development and unification of the technical parameters of the national trunk routes of several countries that form the international direction of transportation between large centers of production and consumption, national norms for regulating transit and foreign trade transportation, logistics activities and the widespread introduction of intermodal technologies in the delivery of goods in this area” [Vardomsky, Turaeva, 2018].

At the same time, by reducing the content of TCs solely to their economic content, researchers ignore an important aspect from the point of view of understanding this phenomenon - the political one. The groundlessness of such a reduction of the TC as an object of scientific research is mentioned in many works and analytical materials [Kalinichenko, 2018; Shcherbanin, 2009].

Noticing this gap in the scientific development of the topic, the authors of the analytical review of the Eurasian Transport Alliance note the ability of transport corridors “to overcome objective physical,

political and economic constraints." At the same time, "the tools to overcome space and compress time are the reduction of institutional and transactional barriers, the use of modern digital technologies and the cooperation of international and national institutions and business communities"

For example, for Eurasia (the continentality of which, according to available calculations, reduces the growth rate of countries by 1.5%) TCs are "a natural and inevitable response to the challenge of the continental situation".

According to M. Sacher and B. Sutton, TCs have become a reality due to the implementation of international law, according to which the regulation of transportation is based on the mutual interest of states, and not the imposition of their preferences by leading states or a group of powerful countries [Zacher, Sutton, 1995].

The synergistic, catalytic effect of transport corridors in socio-economic development as a result of the formation of a system that includes infrastructure, political institutions, investments, etc., notes A. Quim [Quim, 2019: 11].

A significant number of researchers associate the functioning of the transport infrastructure in general and the TC in particular with a positive effect on the real economy of countries. However, other scientists believe that transport corridors primarily provide an increase in the welfare of the population. H. Hashemi [Hashemi, Abdelghany, 2015] studied the state assessment of traffic networks in connection with the functioning of transport corridors.

TC devoted his work to modeling the risks of functioning. D. Cheng [Cheng, 2014; Cheng, Verma, Verter, 2017].

A. Beifert and his colleagues [Beifert, Shcherbanin, Vinokurov, 2018] devoted their scientific report to the analysis of obstacles in the implementation of the uninterrupted functioning of the TC.

Among the few works that include the geopolitical context in the study of transport corridors are the work of D. Turtry [Turtry, 2019] and the scientific report of the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, prepared by L. B. Vardomsky and M. O. Turaeva [Vardomsky, Turaeva, 2018].

### Transport corridors in the global civilizational space

Transport corridors are the result of a qualitatively new level of connectedness of the global civilizational space.

Despite the multidirectional trends in changing the landscape of modern planetary space, the resulting trend of its emerging architecture is interconnectedness. The new civilizational image takes on the outlines of universality and inseparability. The world is becoming so interconnected that it allows us to talk about a different level of academic reflection, acquired in the vision of P. Khanna of the possibility of implementing the scientific discipline "connectography", the refrain of which was the statement "Connectedness is destiny" [Khanna, 2019].

A "connected" world order is born as a result of the struggle of two dialectically contradictory trends – on the one hand, the megatrend of globalization, on the other hand, the growing alternative of cultural, ethnic and national identity, on the other hand. Both of these multidirectional tendencies are equally "participating" in the birth of the "connected world". The first, which is based on the "universality" of the basic foundation - information, overcomes the boundaries of identities (including national ones), universalizes communication channels that connect all countries, peoples and continents

with an inextricable network, dooming the former structures of centers and peripheries, structures, alliances to deprivation, etc. The other, thanks to overcoming the primitive view of the world cultural area as a hierarchy of developed and lagging countries and peoples, causing rejection of the prospect of social development in the form of replicating particular cultural experience with giving the latter universal characteristics, produces a civilizational “request” for the formation of an “organic” order, a feature of which is the inexhaustible value of each cultural and ethnic community and the demand for their interaction, which enriches all participants in the civilizational process.

Considering transport corridors in the context of the manifestation of the global trend of “interconnection”, one should recognize them as a qualitatively different phenomenon in comparison with traditional transport routes, which, in the course of improving the infrastructure, contributed to the deepening of interaction between countries and peoples and the territorial division of labor. The geopolitical trend, “compressing” the physical space, gives rise to a different quality of communications, one of which is transport corridors, aggregating new technologies of multi- and intermodality, integrated forwarding services for managing traffic flows, container and piggyback transportation. It is the transport corridors, like no other component of the transport system, that absorb all the innovations that are actively promoted in the course of the information update of the industry and reduce the cost of transportation by 30% [Zhunusov, 2018].

### **Socio-economic and political significance of transport corridors**

The geographical position and natural conditions of the countries through which the transport corridors pass determine their socio-economic and political significance.

The role of transport corridors in overcoming the isolation of inland continental territories is growing, in connection with the development of value chains, the traditional functions of seaports are undergoing a transformation, which, thanks to “terminalization”, are actively involved in the creation of specialized terminals for servicing inland regions.

Ports in their modern form are not considered as exclusively transshipment points, but take on the form of complex collection and distribution centers, “functionally related to the development of the distribution system in the interior of the country.” Inland logistics centres, terminals and dry ports\* acquire the status of cargo aggregation hubs. An integral component of a logistics complex or a dry port is an intermodal terminal, where cargo (container, piggyback or swap bodies) is transshipped from one mode of transport to another.

The functioning of transport corridors between countries that are members of integration associations and shared territories with increased risks is of critical importance. This is exactly how the transport connection between Russia and Armenia, limited by air transport and not always favorable potential of the Georgian Military Highway, looks like. Thanks to the agreement reached between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia (January 11, 2021), which put an end to the military conflict in Karabakh, a transport corridor (functioning under the USSR) can be restored connecting Azerbaijan with the enclave of Nakhichevan, which should pass through the Syunik region of Armenia and the railway communication between Yerevan and the Syunik region via Nakhichevan. In case of successful implementation of plans to restore the TC, Azerbaijan will receive a transport route to Nakhichevan and Turkey, the Russian Federation - to Turkey and Armenia, and Armenia - to Iran and Russia [Dvali, 2021:

6]. Of course, such an outcome of the case is especially important for the Armenian side. To overcome the "continental blockade" the project of formation of the Kabul corridor, which will connect Uzbekistan with the ports of Karachi and Gwadar on the Arabian Sea, is directed. In case of success in the implementation of these plans, Uzbekistan will receive access to the World Ocean, and Pakistan - access to the markets of Central Asia [Panfilova, 2021: 5].

### Transport corridors in geopolitics

The ability of TC to "narrow" time, overcome and "gather" space endows them with instrumental geopolitical content. As the French sociologist Bruno Latour aptly put it, "overcoming distance is an act of strength" [Latour, 2008].

The formation and functioning of the TC are becoming a powerful factor in aggregating and promoting political will aimed at integrating or isolating the subjects of international relations\*. At the same time, claims to power in the context of geopolitics, TC, in the articulation of J. Allen, should not be interpreted as unquestioning obedience to force or authority, but "correlated with the efficiency with which subjects learn their meaning" [Allen, 2003: 65]. Indeed, great powers and leading regional states do not, as a rule, have to resort to a show of force or direct pressure to form coalitions and promote their own initiatives, including in the transport sector. Their political will is more often realized through the recognition by the recipient countries of the leadership positions of the centers of world power.

And one more important remark of J. Allen regarding the power produced by transport corridors in relation to overcoming space: "Power as a result cannot and should not, according to the intellectual, be expressed from the resource base, regardless of its size. and volume", but results in the effect of "proximity or distance, presence or absence". In other words, the very structure of space "serves as both a resource and a means by which power is exercised" (Allen, 2003: 10–11). Thus, a large-scale project of the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) has become a geopolitical reflection of China's "peaceful rise" through the promotion of the foreign policy concept of a "community of a common destiny" of mankind, within the framework of which Eurasian transport communications in general and corridors in particular are being actively developed [Boyarkina, Pecheritsa, 2020: 23, 28–30]. The Chinese leadership launched this project in March 2016. The One Belt, One Road Initiative, which unites the SREB and the Maritime Silk Road, involves the signing of memorandums of understanding and cooperation with the countries involved in the project.

The Belt and Road Initiative aims to link Asia, Europe and Africa through 14 major routes:

Routes of the Silk Road Economic Belt:

- China - Europe through Central Asia and the Russian Federation;
- China - Middle East through Central Asia;
- China - ports of the Indian Ocean through Southeast and South Asia.

Routes of the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century:

- Chinese seaports - South China Sea - Indian Ocean - Europe;
- Chinese seaports - South China Sea - South Pacific countries.

On the contrary, China's claim to global leadership, which is not always complementary to the national interests, primarily of its neighbors, initiated the geopolitical vector of transport cooperation between the countries of Southeast Asia and Russia. Despite the presence of political differences,

Russian-Japanese cooperation in the transport sector is developing. The implementation of transport corridors from Japan to Europe along the Trans-Siberian Railway has begun. In accordance with the agreements reached by the ministries of transport of Japan and Russia, the Trans-Siberian Railway is open to the movement of block container trains, or block trains (trains that go from one point of departure to one point of destination without separating or storing cargo along the way). Japan's largest companies take part in the transportation of their goods through the TC: the petrochemical corporation Nippon Shokubai, one of the leaders in the automotive industry Honda Motors, the manufacturer of medical equipment Nipro Corporation, etc. The Japanese logistics corporation Nippon Express takes part in the project. As noted by the Japanese news portal Yahoo News Japan, the operation of the Japan-Europe transport corridor through the territory of the Russian Federation makes it possible to reduce the delivery time of goods in comparison with the sea route through the Suez Canal by half and the costs of shippers by 1.5 times.

Transport Corridors as an Instrument of Territory Control "Collecting" the space, TCs are an instrument of control over the territory. In this regard, it is important to note their particular importance for strengthening national sovereignty and the security regime along the perimeter of state borders.

In the noted aspect, transport corridors developing within the framework of post-Soviet integration projects are of critical importance for Russia. That is why the Russian Federation pays great attention to building up the integration potential within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. The EAEU was established in 2014 by Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. From the moment of its establishment, the goal-setting of the association has been aimed at creating a single space for the movement of labor, capital and goods. Undoubtedly, transport plays one of the dominant roles in achieving this goal. In December 2016, the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (SEEC) adopted the fundamental principles of a coordinated policy in the field of transport communication, which should eliminate obstacles in the creation of a single transport space and a common market for transport services by 2025 [*Decision of the Supreme Council of the EAEU, 2017*].

The implementation of the adopted document initiates the creation of new transport corridors and an increase in the transit potential of the association's territory. Currently, each country of the EAEU has forty or more obstacles (barriers, exemptions, restrictions): the Republic of Armenia - 41, the Republic of Belarus - 43, the Republic of Kazakhstan - 44, the Kyrgyz Republic - 40, the Russian Federation - 48. On the way to creating a single transport space, the elimination of such with the help of transport corridors will increase the export potential of each member of the EAEU by 15% per year [Chibukhchyan, Chibukhchyan, Gasparyan, 2018]. The digitization of the logistics infrastructure (creation of digital transport corridors) will significantly increase the efficiency of transport communication in the EAEU. The project for creating this ecosystem was approved by the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council at the Digital Almaty forum on January 31, 2020. The project implementation plans include the creation of services for calculating routes, the introduction of electronic waybills, electronic international waybills, and electronic protocols. [*Kinyakina, 2020*].

On behalf of the heads of the EAEU member states and the PRC, the Eurasian Economic Commission is working to "combine" the integration plans of the EAEU with the Chinese project "The Economic Belt of the Silk Road" in order to activate regional value chains. In 2016, as part of this work, more than 40 projects to expand the transport infrastructure are planned. The implementation of the

planned projects will increase the degree of integration of the transport system of the Eurasian Economic Union with the existing international transport corridors<sup>16</sup>. Assessing the geopolitical significance of the EAEU transport network, D. Turtry writes: “Russia is promoting the unification of the Eurasian space through the EAEU, which creates a kind of political and economic continuum from China to Europe. The EAEU is not only a deterrent for direct contacts between China and Central Asia, but also a bridge between China and Europe” [Turtry, 2019]. Transport corridors acquire the ability to “design” space based on the interests of the subjects of the political process, channeling its transformation in the desired direction.

In the direction of the implementation of their statutory goals, the UN and its divisions are striving to establish conditions for the development of the Euro-Asian transport communication. Since 2002, a joint project of regional organizations of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ES-CAP) on Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) has been implemented. At the first stage of the project implementation (2002-2007), road, rail and inland water transport routes, river and sea ports were identified and priorities for their development prospects and obstacles for freight traffic flows were set. A thorough study of the potential for the implementation of the project resulted in the creation of a group of experts to coordinate the process of forming a “holistic Euro-Asian inland transportation system.”

During the second phase (2008-2013), nine rail and nine road routes out of a proposed 311 were agreed upon as the main “connections between Europe and Asia”, a free interactive geographic information system (GIS) with an accessible EATL route database was developed.

38 countries took part in the implementation of the third stage, during which work continues to monitor cargo flows, optimize the timing and costs of cargo delivery, an attempt is made to introduce integrated schedules for routes and unify tariffs. Thanks to the implementation of the third phase of the project, significant steps were taken in advancing the regional and global agendas formalized in the resolutions of the UN General Assembly 69/213 “The role of transport and transit corridors in ensuring international cooperation for sustainable development” (December 2014), 70/1 Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (September 2015), 70/197 Towards an inclusive interoperability between all modes of transport to promote sustainable multimodal transit corridors (December 2015), the Vienna Program adopted by the Second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries for the decade 2014–2024. (November 2014), Ashgabat Sustainable Transport Process (November 2016). At the session of the Inland Transport Committee (February 2017), Ministers of Transport, high-level representatives of 58 countries and the EU Commissioner for Transport adopted a resolution “Entering a new era of sustainable inland transport and mobility” and agreed to work towards improving the efficiency of regional and intercontinental transport links .

The interests of the subjects of the political space inevitably produce competition for the promotion of their own direction of transport communications. At the same time, transport corridors are becoming a powerful tool in this confrontation.

At the same time, the contradictions that arise in connection with the competition of nationally oriented transport corridors do not always become the cause of international disagreements. For example, in the practice of cooperation between the EAEU countries, such problems are overcome on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation.

Since 2010, the EAEU states have been actively participating in the China-EU transcontinental container transit along the Trans-Siberian Railway and the Northern Corridor of the Trans-Asian Railway. Due to the introduction of the practice of transporting container trains (block trains), it was possible to achieve the competitiveness of rail transit of goods along the Trans-Siberian Railway in comparison with the sea. Thanks to the implementation of the Trans-Siberian in 7 days program, trains with an average daily speed of 1200 km began to be used.

However, Chinese manufacturers (especially since 2015) preferred the shorter (approximately 1,000 km) Northern Corridor of HOAs passing through the territory of Kazakhstan. In 2014, the main part of China-EU-PRC transit cargo went through Zabaikalsk (Russia), and already in 2016, 2/3 of the volume of Chinese containers began to be sent through Kazakh border points [Vardomsky, Turaeva, 2018].

In 2020, the volume of the company's latitudinal container traffic reached about 600 thousand TEUs (two-foot equivalent) (TEU). The average speed of container trains from the border point Dostyk (Kazakhstan) to the EU border is 5 days.

Integration as an alternative to competition is able to intensify the formation of new transport corridors due to the aggregation of national resources that are insufficient for the implementation of large-scale projects. Thus, 50% of the shares of Ulaanbaatar Railway JSC, serving the China-Mongolia-Russia route, belong to Russian Railways [Tertri, 2019: 100].

At the same time, it would be simplistic to imagine that the functioning of the TC results exclusively in integration trends. In a geopolitical perspective, their organization and development are still associated with competition. For example, the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Moscow, Kazem Jalali, in an interview with Vedomosti on April 7, 2021, expressed confidence that the North-South transport corridor “could compete with the Suez Canal” [Lesnykh, 2021].

Transport corridors, aggregating innovative approaches in the industry, are an important factor in acquiring geopolitical status by the subjects of international politics, which is determined, among other things, by the level of economic development and its advancement in innovative restructuring. In this regard, control over the TC is able to provide a certain “advance” of viability and political significance even to a developing state that claims a certain place and role in the global communication system.

Awareness of the importance of the TC in increasing the economic and political potential of the country prompted the leadership of Turkey, consistently implementing the strategy of recreating the Great Porte, to the development of transport corridors along the meridional and latitudinal directions. In 2013, the Marmaray project was implemented, which provided railway communication between the Asian and European parts of Istanbul through a tunnel under the Bosphorus Strait with a length of 13.6 km. Together with the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (2017), Marmaray provided intermodal communication between the countries of Central Asia, China and Europe through Turkey. Turkey's transit potential is enhanced by the implementation of the Lapis Lazuli Corridor project, which runs along the route of the ancient Great Silk Road and contributes to the activation of transport links in the direction of Afghanistan - Azerbaijan - Georgia - Turkey - Turkmenistan.

The Viking route, an agreement on which was reached in September 2013 between the Lithuanian Railways and the Turkish State Railways, connected the ports of the Baltic and Black Seas. The geopolitical context within the framework of the Polish doctrine of the Intermarium (integration of



Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova, Hungary, Romania, the Balkan countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) the project of the transport corridor "Via Karpatia" is being filled, which runs along the route Lithuania - Poland - Slovakia - Hungary - Romania -Bulgaria - Greece [Skripov , 2019].

### Conclusions

Thus, transport corridors structured into national, regional and international, in addition to their direct purpose - the socio-economic development of territories and improving the living standards of the population - have an important and integral geopolitical context. Possessing such properties, TCs become an effective tool for constructing the geopolitical "design" of civilizational space. In terms of geopolitics, transport corridors are a means of institutionalizing its directing vectors, and multimodal logistics centers act as "control valves" that can increase or limit traffic along transport communications and, therefore, play an important role as a means of competition for their regulation. In the light of the above, it seems possible to define transport corridors as spaces of mass traffic flows organized on the basis of a unified technical, managerial and legal infrastructure, which are important in terms of the socio-economic development of territories, the promotion of national interests and determine the geopolitical landscape.

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