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Georgia as a Black Sea Connectivity Node of the Middle Corridor

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Abstract

Introduction. The article considers the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route) as a form of “connectivity policy”, in which material infrastructure (ports, corridors, cables) redefines the place of Georgia and its Black Sea region in the configuration of power and regional security. Georgia, which has port and transit infrastructure at the junction of the Black Sea and Caspian basins, acts as a hub for competing European, Chinese, Turkish and regional projects that affect the socio-economic dynamics and identity of the Black Sea region.

Materials and Methods. The methodological basis is made up of systemic and comparative political approaches, elements of geoeconomic analysis and concepts of social and political philosophy of space (subjectivity, power, center/periphery, “competing connectivities”). The empirical base includes strategic documents of Georgia in the field of transport, materials of the EU and international financial institutions on Trans-Caspian and Black Sea connectivity, as well as studies on the port of Anaklia and energy and digital corridors.

Results. The National Transport and Logistics Strategy 2023–2030 transfers the transit role of Georgia from a “natural” geographical advantage to a managed national project and consolidates the Georgian Black Sea region as a key hub of the Middle Corridor. The growth of container processing and the creation of a joint operator of the railway segment are interpreted as the institutionalization of a new configuration of the regional space; the EU and Chinese involvement infuses infrastructure with competing political meanings.

Discussion and Conclusion. Georgia’s strategic benefit is determined not only by the volume of investments but also by the nature of its subjectivity: the ability to ensure transparency of governance, balance the interests of external actors and take into account the consequences for local communities.

Keywords: Georgia, Black Sea region, Middle Corridor, Trans-Caspian route, connectivity, Anaklia port, Black Sea ports, South Caucasus, social and political philosophy, geoeconomics

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Оригинальное теоретическое исследование

Грузия как причерноморский узел связности Среднего коридора

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Аннотация

Введение. Рассматривается Средний коридор (Транскаспийский международный транспортный маршрут) как форму «политики связности», в рамках которой материальная инфраструктура (порты, коридоры, кабели) переопределяет место Грузии и её Причерноморья в конфигурации власти и региональной безопасности. Грузия, располагающая портовой и транзитной инфраструктурой на стыке Черноморского и Каспийского бассейнов,

выступает узлом конкурирующих европейских, китайских, турецких и региональных проектов, влияющих на социально-экономическую динамику и идентичность Причерноморья.

Материалы и методы. Методологическую основу составляют системный и сравнительно-политический подходы, элементы геоэкономического анализа и концепции социальной и политической философии пространства (субъектность, власть, центр/периферия, «конкурирующие связности»). Эмпирическая база включает стратегические документы Грузии в сфере транспорта, материалы ЕС и международных финансовых институтов по Транскаспийской и черноморской связности, а также исследования по порту Анаклия и энергетико-цифровым коридорам.

Результаты исследования. Национальная стратегия транспорта и логистики 2023–2030 гг. переводит транзитную роль Грузии из «естественного» географического преимущества в управляемый национальный проект и закрепляет грузинское Причерноморье как ключевой узел Среднего коридора. Рост контейнерной обработки и создание совместного оператора железнодорожного сегмента интерпретируются как институционализация новой конфигурации регионального пространства; участие ЕС и Китая наполняет инфраструктуру конкурирующими политическими смыслами.

Обсуждение и заключение. Стратегическая выгода Грузии определяется не только объёмом инвестиций, но и характером её субъектности: способностью обеспечивать прозрачность управления, баланс интересов внешних акторов и учёт последствий для местных сообществ.

Ключевые слова: Грузия, Причерноморье, Средний коридор, Транскаспийский маршрут, связность, порт Анаклия, черноморские порты, Южный Кавказ, социальная и политическая философия, геоэкономика

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Introduction. The Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route) is a multimodal line connecting China and Central Asia with the South Caucasus and further with Europe through Turkey and/or the Black Sea. In the optics of social and political philosophy, this is not just a “route on a map” but a spatial policy: infrastructure collects new centers and peripherals, nodes and borders, sets the modes of inclusion and exclusion [1]. Officially, the corridor is described as a way to increase the stability of Eurasian logistics during a period of turbulence [2], but it is more logical to read it as a re-marking of the political space of Eurasia.

For the Georgian Black Sea region, this means reassembling the country’s transit role and place in regional and global ties. Ports and crossing points of transport, energy and digital lines turn into “dense” zones where money, power and semantic frameworks (development, security, “Europeanism”) converge. Thus, geopolitics gets a material form and begins to work as a social and spatial order.

Hence the high political degree of the topic for Georgia: the corridor is associated with security and foreign policy positioning. The desire to consolidate the role of the “bridge” and logistics hub between Europe and Asia is reflected in the National Transport and Logistics Strategy 2023–2030 and digital transformation plans including the modernization of port and coastal infrastructure [3]. However, transit expectations rest on institutional quality and relations with the EU: candidate status was obtained in December 2023, and in 2024 an actual pause was recorded against the background of concern about democratic practices and the rule of law [4]. In a philosophical perspective, this makes the corridor infrastructure a test of subjectivity: whether Georgia will be able to set the rules of the game or its role will form external discourses of connectivity.

The scientific novelty of the article is that Georgia is considered as a case of the “policy of connectivity” in the Black Sea region. At the center of the analysis is how institutions, relationships with external actors and competing connectivity projects affect the transit subjectivity and trajectories of the region’s development, as well as which images of the Black Sea region are enshrined in development and security discourses (“corridor”, “node”, “frontier”, “bridge”).

Hypothesis: strategic benefits are determined by investment, institutional predictability, foreign policy coherence and how elites comprehend the Black Sea region: as a resource for autonomous development or an object of external management. The purpose of the article is to show Georgia’s place in the architecture of the Middle Corridor as a Black Sea hub and to assess risks and opportunities for foreign policy and geoeconomic strategy. For this, the institutional and infrastructural foundations of participation, the interests of external actors, the importance of Anaklia and the Black Sea cable initiatives are analyzed, conclusions and recommendations are formulated taking into account the philosophical dimensions of regional policy.

Materials and Methods. The methodological framework collects systemic, comparative-political and philosophical views on the space and sets the research logic: how Georgia’s transit subjectivity is changing under the pressure of the “competing connections” of the Middle Corridor.

The Black Sea region of Georgia is considered as a junction of land and sea routes, as well as energy and digital lines of the Black Sea-Caspian macroregion. The middle corridor is interpreted as a network of “hardware and meanings”: the infrastructure simultaneously solves technical problems and consolidates the political framework.

The study is structured as a comparative case analysis: the strategies of actors that include the Georgian Black Sea region in their connectivity projects (EU and Global Gateway, China and “Belt and Road Initiative”, Turkey and Azerbaijan) are

compared [5]. The geoeconomic perspective helps operationalize infrastructure impact through three indicators: benefit sharing (tariffs/logistics), node control (ports/operators), and rule modes (procedures/standards) [6, 7, 8].

Discourse analysis through the categories of space, power, subjectivity and identity captures how images of the future region, “normal” development models and permissible limits of participation of external actors are constructed in strategies, reports and media; for this, key metaphors and roles (“corridor”, “node”, “bridge”, “frontier”) are distinguished and their use in different sources is compared.

The empirical base includes reports from the World Bank and OECD [1, 2], EU materials on Global Gateway and Trans-Caspian connectivity [3, 5, 9], documents and statistics of the Ministry of Economy of Georgia on port and transport infrastructure [3, 4], studies on Anaklia and competition of “connectivities” [10, 11]. Sources are used to reconstruct dynamics and to “read” what images of space, development and security they produce.

Results. The adoption of the National Transport and Logistics Strategy 2023–2030 and the Action Plan 2023–2024 is an attempt to “stake out” Georgia’s role in Eurasian logistics: transit ceases to be a bonus of geography and turns into a managed project. The documents list the key levers (ports, railways, east-west transport route, digital procedures and a “single window”), that is, a practical scheme is set for how the country’s connectivity and its Black Sea region should work.

The figures for 10 months of 2023 play along with this story: container processing exceeded 607 thousand TEU (+61,3%) [3]. But for research, it is not the growth itself that is more important, but its nature: is it a steady shift in routes or the effect of a low base and temporary flow of flows? In such a reading, statistics becomes a marker of the corridor dependence on the external situation, and not a “certificate of success”.

The World Bank and the OECD formulate the same double signal: there is potential, but the corridor slows down at the joints due to multimodality, borders and heterogeneous rules. Hence the working hypothesis: the Georgian sector wins only with regional synchronization, without coordination with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkey, internal reforms run into external restrictions. The creation of the Middle Corridor Multimodal operator in 2023 can be understood as an attempt to make such synchronization permanent through the coordination of tariffs, schedules and procedures [11].

Outside, the corridor lives in several “versions of the future”. The EU promotes Trans-Caspian connectivity through Global Gateway, linking infrastructure with governance standards and sustainability; at the EU-Central Asia forum in January 2024, the readiness of financial institutions to support such projects was confirmed [3]. China, on the contrary, sees in the Georgian ports and the perspective of Anaklia an instrument for diversifying routes and presence in the Black Sea [7]. As a result, the same nodes get different political meanings and this fuels the competition of interpretations.

Therefore, Anaklia remains the “nerve” of the agenda: the history of tenders and the change in PPP formats shows the high foreign policy burden of the project. In research optics, this is a test of institutions: weather it is possible to raise capital without losing transparency, competition and compliance without which the trust of partners collapses or not [8].

Finally, connectivity is increasingly measured not by containers but by cables and energy. Global Gateway highlights an underwater digital cable in the Black Sea (focus on Georgia and Armenia) and an electric interconnector for exporting “green energy” to Europe. The creation in 2024 of a joint company of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary to promote the Black Sea energy corridor confirms the transition to a multi-level infrastructure architecture [9]. Here the rate is higher: with institutional stability, this strengthens the subjectivity of Georgia, with a lack of predictability, it increases dependence and vulnerability.

Discussion and Conclusion. The results of the study show: for Georgia, the Middle Corridor is both a “maneuver window” and a set of rigid boundaries. Philosophically, these are different configurations of the “space – power – subjectivity” bundle, which manifest themselves through infrastructure.

The economic effect appears only when the entire route is configured: if neighboring links slow down, the Georgian section rests against other people’s “bottlenecks”. Therefore, as international organizations emphasize, not only ports and rails decide, but also “soft” conditions (general procedures, digital document flow, predictable tariffs and simpler boundaries). In research optics, this is a key conclusion: the corridor becomes a single space where joint regulation and trust arise, and Georgia’s competitiveness is measured by both infrastructure and inclusion in this general logic.

European interest in Trans-Caspian connectivity may strengthen the “European framework” through standards and investment, but everything rests on the dynamics of relations with the EU. Candidate status (December 2023) is adjacent to fixing the problems of democracy and the actual pause in 2024 [10], so trust and institutional compatibility become variables of infrastructure policy: Georgia’s role as a “European” node depends not only on funding but also on political perception by partners.

The Chinese factor reinforces the need for risk management, especially around Anaklia. The port is discussed as an asset and as a marker of foreign policy priorities and possible dependencies. For research, this is a convenient “stress test” of institutions: success requires combining capital with transparency, competition and compliance, otherwise the infrastructure solution begins to change the balance of power and subjectivity.

The shift towards digital and energy connectivity expands opportunities but increases the requirements for legal stability, a long horizon of planning and coordination of the interests of the EU, the South Caucasus and the Black Sea. Here the rate is higher, because we are referring to inclusion in the technological and energy chains that will shape the future of the Black Sea region.

In general, Georgia remains a key Black Sea link in the corridor with access to the EU and Turkey. The 2023–2030 strategy and the growth of container processing record the desire to consolidate this role, but practical benefits depend on three conditions: regional coordination (including Middle Corridor Multimodal) [11], transparent decisions on Anaklia and a stable trajectory of relations with the EU, which Global Gateway capabilities depend on [12]. Therefore, it is reasonable to read the Middle Corridor as a strategy of regional subjectivity: ports, corridors and cables here “collect” not only logistics but also new forms of power and identity in the Black Sea-Caspian region.

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