

The Possible Effects of the KATB Project over the Caucasus Politics

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After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new power vacuums appeared and the world politics saw new states which were the members of the Soviet Union. This new situation created new chances for Turkey and Europe and for their new partners within the heritage of the Soviets.

In that content, the chances can be listed in economic and strategic sides for the West. However, especially for Turkey, there are also benefits in the cultural sides. Additionally, the new circumstances include so many benefits for Turkey. In that position, there are also serious gains for the new countries of the region, especially in the Trans-Caucasus Region. In that sense, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Projects have serious and important meanings for the future of the region with the West.

Another project which will increase the integration level of the region with the West is the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku Railway Project (KATB). The project was firstly discussed in the July 1993. However, three countries who will establish the project (Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) could achieve to sign a declaration for the construction of the project in the May 2005 during the ceremonies of BTC Pipeline. According to declaration, the construction is going to start in 2006 and it is wanted to finish in 2008. According to feasibility workings, the project will cost nearly \$500 million. In the Turkey side of the project, there are 68 km to establish between Kars and Tbilisi. This area will cost \$200 million. There is also a newly constructed part in the project between Aktap and Akhalkalaki which probably cost \$52 million. There is also a line between Akhalkalaki and Marabda which is long 160 km and this line should also be renewed.¹

After a brief about the project, I want to show the possible impacts of the project (KATB) for the region and for the political future of the countries in the Trans-Caucasus, Europe, Central Asia. According to my thesis, the project will increase the integration level of Europe to Caucasus and the disintegration of Armenia to the economic future of the South Caucasus. At the end of the day, this project will be a kind of mean to enforce Armenia in order to accept the policies of Turkey and Azerbaijan. The last point can be found very optimistic but the current developments increase the exclusiveness of Armenia within the economic and political transactions of the Trans-Caucasus and they also increased the dependency of Armenia to Georgia in order to transact to Russia.²

Due to the possible effects of the politics, Armenia officially tried to change the final point of the project by using the Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi railway road which is currently established. In order to achieve this, Armenian lobby in the United States sent a letter to the Secretary of State, Rice about the USA funds for the project. They wanted to the USA not to fund the project. As we can guess, Georgia has not an economic power to fund the 38 km railway in its territory. Therefore, they will need some funds which can come from abroad. At that point, there are some new in the Georgian newspaper about the EU funds for the project.³ According to Georgian State, the project will become a major component of the Transport

Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA) Plan. Therefore, the activities of the Armenian lobby in the USA may not achieve to blockade the construction of the KATB by only blocking the USA funds to the project.

Under the light of this brief, we can try to find out the benefits of these three countries from the KATB more easily and deeply. According to this perspective, firstly we should look at the gains of Turkey, secondly Azerbaijan and finally Georgian benefits.

Turkey's Benefits from the KATB:

As we mentioned above, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the sun birth for new gains of Turkey. We can list these benefits under the title of economic, strategic and cultural categories. In economic side, Turkey tries to get some benefits from the Caspian Oil and it also tries to get close to the Central Asia by using its historical background. These days, most of the Far East Countries become richer and China becomes a new superpower of the World. There are serious raw materials and resources in the Caspian Catchments and Central Asia. As a result, the KATB Project would be a kind of element to achieve this integration to the region as BTC project done.

Strategically, Turkey tries to balance the Russian effect over the region and it wants to show its geopolitical position in the Eurasia by these kinds of transportation projects and pipelines, etc. The KATB Project can give a chance to bypass Russia from the transportation issue of the Eurasia. In that sense, Turkey tries to catch up the chances of its geopolitical positions in the region. Since the KATB project may reach thorough the Central Asia by the support of Kazakhstan. Therefore, Turkey can gain very strong role in the economic and strategic future of the Central Asia and Trans-Caucasus.⁴

In cultural side, Turkey gets the chance to reach the Central Asia by a direct transportation line. By the help of this line, the connection level will be higher and the Central Asia will also directly join to Europe.

Azerbaijan's Benefits from the KATB:

According to Azerbaijan perspective, the project has some important effects in terms of economic and strategic sides. Economically, Azerbaijan gets an opportunity to sell its oil by a new way and this line will provide it a chance to reach to Europe by Turkey. Due to the KATB Project, Azerbaijan will reach to Turkey and also will tight to Europe by only one project.⁵ And as Georgian State finds the KATB Project a part of TRACACE, Azerbaijan also sees the project as a part of TRACACE. At the 60th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Azerbaijan's Ambassador to the UN, Yashar Aliyev, said that the KATB Project will be a guarantor of sustainable development and security in the South Caucasus and Eurasia as a whole.⁶

Strategically, Azerbaijan tries to balance Armenia economically after the victory of Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh War. Due to achieve that, Azerbaijan tries to block all of economic transactions of Armenia in the Trans-Caucasus. Another interesting point is that, Turkey and Azerbaijan decided to sing the declaration of the KATB after the Azerbaijan flights to the Ercan Airport in the Northern Cyprus.⁷ Therefore; these two countries use these kinds of elements in order to achieve their shared strategic plans through Armenia. Another way, Azerbaijan will obviously increase its oil money by BTC and KATB Projects. At the end

of the day, we can see a new hot struggle between Armenia and Azerbaijan if Russia doesn't block the Azerbaijan policies.

Georgia's Benefits from the KATB:

As we saw that in the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the citizens want more rights and wealth from their state. Therefore; the Georgian State should find new way to provide its citizens' demands and secure itself within the Caucasus Politics. In that sense, the BTC and KATB Projects give that chance to Georgia in order to achieve its own goals. Therefore; these projects have some impacts for Georgian State in economic, strategic and social terms.

In the economic and strategic terms, Georgia tries to show its geopolitical importance to its close neighbors, the EU, Russia and the USA. It means that Georgia is an important area in order to achieve transportation issues within the Southern Caucasus. For Azerbaijan, Georgia is a crucial partner in order to reach the Black Sea and the EU. For Turkey, Georgia is a gate in order to reach the Central Asia. For Russia, Georgia is a kind of base in order to control the transit road of Caspian Sources.

In the social term, Georgia can gain a chance to get near the solution of any ethnic problem which is in Javakheti Region. The KATB road will go true Akhalkalaki which is in that region and the big population of Javakheti is Armenian. Due to that, Armenia tried to use that minority in order to block the project. However, because of the Armenian dependency to Georgia in order to reach Russia, Georgia could easily challenge this policy. Additionally, Georgian Government thinks to achieve the reintegration of Javakheti Region to Georgian Society by the economic benefits of the KATB. Therefore; this project will probably give a chance to Georgia in order to solve its one of ethnic problems.⁸

Disadvantages of Armenia:

As we mentioned above, the KATB Project will increase the exclusiveness of Armenia within the Southern Caucasus in economic and strategic terms. Due to achieve to block the KATB, the Armenian lobby in the USA and they suggested use the railway between Kars and Gyumri. However, this railway is century old and it is not operational over ten years. In addition, these two countries (Turkey and Armenia) are in a state of war.⁹

Another current problem for Armenia is the Azerbaijan's increasing influence over the Southern Caucasus. Since Azerbaijan will gain more oil money and it may improve its economy. This situation is pregnant higher military expenditure of Azerbaijan and new challenges to Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. Another way, Azerbaijan forms new alliances in the region against the national interests of Armenia and day by day, Baku becomes the most influential center of the Southern Caucasus.¹⁰ Additionally, Baku can challenge the economic transactions between Georgia and Armenia by bypassing the trains which goes true Armenia.¹¹ Because of the fact that, Armenia sees two reasons of the KATB Project. One is economic reason which was explained above, the other one is political reason. According to that perspective, Turkey and Azerbaijan try to exclude Armenia from the socio-economic future of the Trans-Caucasus.¹²

Conclusion:

As we mentioned above, the KATB Project has very crucial effects over the Caucasus Politics. In that content, it will affect Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan in terms of getting more closed. However, these kinds of projects would increase disintegration level of Armenia within the region. In current situation, if any country tries to reach the West and the USA, it should form good and close relations with Turkey. In that sense, Georgia and Azerbaijan improve their relations with Turkey. In other words, if any country tries to reach Russia, it should have good relations with Iran.¹³ Although Armenia wants to reach the West in order to develop its economy, Turkish and Azeri alliance doesn't allow that. Armenia can only form close relations with Russia in military and economic terms. However, in order to continue this situation, Armenia needs Georgian territory. Therefore; if Georgia will see its benefits in side of Western Alliance, this means a catastrophe for Armenia. However, BTC and KATB Projects show us that Georgia is getting close to the Western Alliance day by day.

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⁴ Sohbet Mamedov, "Baku and Ankara will bypass Russia. A new intercontinental transportation corridor is being formed", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, (Moscow: June 2005)

⁵ Zaal Anjaparidze, "Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan Launch New Strategic Railway Project", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol.2 Issue 110 (June 2005), p.2

⁶ Taleh Ziyadov, "Officials Meet to Discuss South Caucasus Rail System", http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2370599, (Dec. 2005)

⁷ The New Anatolian, "New railway to Link Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan", *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, (Jan. 2005) <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news.php?id=17362>

⁸ Anjaparidze, "Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan Launch New Strategic Railway Project", p.2

⁹ Ziyadov, "Officials Meet to Discuss South Caucasus Rail System"

¹⁰ Svante E. Cornell, "Geopolitics and Strategic Alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. IV, Number:2 (June-August 1999) pp. 4-6
<http://www.sam.gov.tr/perceptions/Volume4/June-August1999/cornell.pdf>

¹¹ Araz Aslanlı, "Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan Relations and Georgian Turks", *TUSAM*, <http://www.tusam.net/makaleler.asp?id=136> (Aug. 2005)

¹² François Gremy, Trans. By Geraldine RING, "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, A Very "Political" Railway Line", http://www.caucaz.com/home_eng/breve_contenu.php?id=219 (Paris: Dec. 2005)

¹³ Cornell, "Geopolitics and Strategic Alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia", p.6