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PARADIGMS OF GEORGIA'S TRANSIT POTENTIAL IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Abstract. As the centuries pass, global civilization continues to evolve, fostering the progress of globalization processes. Consequently, contemporary society witnesses the increasing convergence of social, economic, political, and demographic processes, which amplifies the significance of international economic activities among nations. Throughout the stages of civilizational development, trade and transportation relations between states have been of paramount importance. In today's context, this is even more pronounced, as the transportation of goods, transit, and customs procedures serve as mechanisms for shaping economic, social, and political relations among nations. Furthermore, they support developing countries in establishing

themselves within regional and international trade markets. Georgia is no exception. Historically, it was a significant part of the Silk Road, linking East and West, facilitating the exchange of goods, cultures, and ideas. The strategic location of our country at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia plays a vital role in regional and international transportation and trade. Georgia acts as a key connector, bridging historically distinct Europe and Asia. Thus, Georgia's transit corridor emerges as a crucial element of regional and international transport and trade networks. The primary aim of this scientific work is to determine Georgia's importance as a major transit country in the context of significant socio-economic developments of recent years. The subject of this study is the current state of Georgia's transit potential, including goods transported via transit and the role of the TIR carnet system in these processes. The object of research is Georgia's transit corridor and its geo-economic realities. Georgia is actively developing transit infrastructure to further enhance its role as a regional and international transit hub. Its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, combined with ongoing infrastructure projects and efforts to improve transport connectivity, positions Georgia as a leading player in transit development. The country has established connections with neighboring states – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey – as well as with major trading nations such as the United States, China, and Eastern European countries.

Keywords: transit; Georgia's transit system; transit corridors; TIR carnet system; movement of goods; transit potential.

INTRODUCTION / ВСТУП

Statement of the problem / Постановка проблеми. Over the course of history, the movement of people and goods between nations has held great significance. This remains the case today and has become even more relevant, as the transportation of goods between countries is a means of establishing relations. Georgia is no exception, as it stands out due to its strategic location. This geographical feature has made Georgia a natural bridge between Europe and Asia for centuries, turning it today into a key transit hub between the East and West. For this reason, it is crucial to understand the importance of transit corridors.

A transit corridor forms the backbone of a country's economy and foreign political positioning, and thus, it is essential to focus on the development of its potential. Given that Georgia's transit potential is intertwined with the country's geopolitical and geo-economic functions on both the regional and international stage, it is of utmost importance to analyze the potential economic and political

risks, challenges, and opportunities that arise. Georgia, due to its geopolitical location, serves as a bridge between the West and Central Asian countries.

The commodity transit operation plays a significant role in deepening trade relations, as it allows foreign goods to move across Georgia's customs territory without the imposition of tariffs, while customs control still takes place. The transit procedure can be carried out through various modes of transport, whether by air, sea, land, or rail. Year after year, the volume of goods transited through Georgia has increased, driven by a more efficient use of our transit corridors.

A transit corridor serves as the main driver of a country's economic, social, political, and cultural development, accelerating integration processes at both regional and international levels. Fully utilizing Georgia's transit potential will guarantee an improvement in the country's geopolitical and economic standing. Therefore, it is essential to analyze both the regional and international aspects of Georgia's transit corridors, as well as the challenges and opportunities they present.

Today, Georgia is the main connecting country in the transit procedure between Europe and Asia, due to its unique location, which has been of great benefit to Georgia throughout history. Our country has always been a key player on the Silk Road, a position it still maintains in the 21st century, remaining an important transit hub. As mentioned earlier, Georgia's transit corridors hold both regional and international significance, as evidenced by the country's role as the main transportation hub in the Caucasus. Georgia is a participant in the regional energy transit network and a member of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor (TRACECA), which provides an alternative route for the movement of goods and energy resources between two continents, thus reducing the dependence of various countries on Russian routes.

Over the centuries, Georgia has become the main transit country in Eastern Europe, capable of establishing a transit hub and achieving significant socio-economic development. In general, Georgia's transit corridor is a crucial link between the Black Sea region and the vast territories of Eurasia. Its strategic location has made it a key trade and transport hub. Georgia's importance as a transit corridor between Europe and Asia is undeniable. Its strategic position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia makes it a natural transit hub for the movement of goods and the implementation of transit procedures.

Throughout all stages of history, the movement of people, trade, and goods between nations has held significant importance. This situation has not changed today; on the contrary, the targeted use of transit potential is even more relevant, as the movement of goods between states is a means of establishing relationships. Georgia is no exception, as our country is distinguished by its location. This feature has historically compelled Georgia to act as a connector between the countries of Europe and Asia, a role that has brought our country to

its status as the main transit center between the West and the East. For this reason, reviewing the transit corridors and understanding the significance and essence of the TIR carnet becomes of special importance.

Analysis of (major) recent research and publications / Аналіз (основних) останніх досліджень і публікацій. Georgia's transit function has become even more relevant in the context of modern global challenges. High rates of economic growth and other factors significantly influence the utilization of its transit potential. „Georgia and the countries of transit cargo volume growth depends on the country's foreign trade balance, fluctuations in the exchange rate as well as growth in its main trading partner countries in the macro-economic development speed“ [6], [8].

The Anaklia deep-sea port is becoming a significant guarantee for enhancing Georgia's potential as a transit country. „The deep water port of Anaklia will strengthen Georgia's potential as a transit country and help turn the Central Asian and Caucasus region into a transport node. The mentioned project has gained relevance and significance in connection with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the imposition of EU and US sanctions on it. These developments have highlighted the importance of an alternative transport "Middle Corridor" connecting Europe-Asia, which competes with the Northern Corridor through Russia, despite the possibility of the fastest transportation of large volumes of goods. As a result of the current geopolitical situation, the Northern Corridor has largely lost its significance today. Consequently, the Middle Corridor and Georgia along with it have the opportunity to become one of the main transit corridors, as well as the main transport node between the two continents“ [24], [45].

The new geopolitical reality and the opening of an alternative corridor through Nakhchivan pose a real threat to Georgia's transit potential. „According to the Azerbaijani experts, construction of the new railway line will allow Azerbaijan to connect with Europe in more diverse ways, which will free the country from excessive dependence on Georgia, despite the calm and stable bilateral relations. They also explain that the new land connections will guarantee more peace and economic stability in the region. Some of them also suppose that the role of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway could suffer significantly if Azerbaijan appears to have a more economically viable and efficient transit corridor. In addition, Iran, which will get a possibility to have a direct line with Russia, also benefits significantly. However, at the same time, the number of cargos coming from Azerbaijan will importantly be reduced“ [26], [2].

Since gaining independence, Georgia has emerged as a new player and a significant geoeconomic hub between Asia and Europe. „The main geopolitical task of the country is integration into the European structures. Thus, the geopolitical strategy is clearly declared, and for the creation a niche for itself in

the world economy, of utmost importance is to formulate and implement a well-constructed geo-economic strategy in relevant cooperation with local and international allies in the region. Thus, Georgia's geo-economic positions are influenced by: the intraregional level players (Armenia, Azerbaijan); in the case of the interregional level – Russia, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia countries; and such international level players as the EU, the United States and China“ [15], [17].

Amid modern geopolitical tensions, Georgia's role as part of the "Middle Corridor" has become even more critical. „The Russian war against Ukraine, the extensive Western sanctions against Russia, the blockade of the east–west transit corridors through Russian territory, including the various China – Central Asia – Russia –Europe transit corridors and the Northern Corridor branch of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), that traverse Eurasia have impacted on new dynamics of the three corridors through the South Caucasus: the 'Middle Corridor', the 'International North – South Transport Corridor' (INSTC), and the 'Persian Gulf – Black Sea International Transport and Transit Corridor' (ITC). While neither Iran nor Russia play a role in the Middle Corridor' as it bypasses the two countries, Tehran and Moscow (as well as Baku) are very active in the INSTC“ [16], [14].

To stimulate the growth and utilization of Georgia's transit potential, it is essential to enhance transport infrastructure. Following the construction of the Anaklia deep-sea port and the completion of the East-West highway, transit customs procedures will gain new significance. „Historical experience demonstrates close correlation between the geopolitical objectives of a state and the establishment of a reliable transport networks. Having reliable and effective transportation networks for easy access to global markets is vital for modern economic development and security, particularly for landlocked states with disadvantageous geographical locations. Coastal countries enjoy more advantageous positions in this sense, since they have direct and secure access to the maritime routes through which a major part of modern international trade is conducted“ [12], [68].

[3,1] describe Georgia's geopolitical role as a transit country, acting as a bridge between Europe and Asia. The authors focus on the benefits and prospects of Georgia's transportation system, which contribute to promoting regional stability and economic growth.

[4,6] provides an in-depth analysis of Georgia's transportation and logistics sector and highlights key challenges such as the need for infrastructure renewal, refinement of transportation legislation, and improvement of service quality.

[7,7] emphasizes Georgia's potential to play a regional hub role and discusses the impact of infrastructure projects. The paper highlights the significance of this role not only for the country but also for neighboring countries.

[5] focuses on the development of Georgia as a geoeconomic hub. The author examines transit opportunities, and the challenges associated with global economic processes and the impact of political factors.

[13] highlights the implementation of customs logistics principles and the potential for increasing transit capacity in Georgia. The author underscores the importance of customs system reforms and their impact on simplifying transit processes.

The Georgian International Road Transport Association and other international sources (2020) discuss the TIR system, which ensures the security and efficiency of maritime and road transport. This system is important for Georgia as it facilitates the simplification of international transit and deepens relationships between countries.

[1] examines Georgia's transport corridor potential within the TRACECA project framework, aiming to develop and integrate the Europe-Caucasus-Asia route.

The British Petroleum report on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline discusses the significance and impact of energy transport on Georgia's economy.

AIM AND TASKS / МЕТА ТА ЗАВДАННЯ

The primary **objective** of this scientific article is to establish Georgia's significance as a major transit country amidst significant socio-economic developments in recent years. Additionally, it aims to identify and assess the history, opportunities, and legislation of transit development, analyze the role and essence of the TIR carnet system in this process, evaluate quantitative indicators of cargo transportation over recent years, and determine the dynamics influencing the country's economic status.

The subject of this study is the current paradigms of Georgia's transit potential, the goods transported through transit, and the involvement of the TIR carnet system in this process. The research object includes Georgia's transit corridors, the modes of transport used in transit procedures, the TIR carnet convention, and the economic benefits of goods transported via different modes of transport.

To achieve the set objectives, *the following tasks* are necessary:

1. Analyze the significance of the TIR carnet system during customs transit procedures.
2. Examine the economic essence of transit.
3. Review transit corridors and their legal frameworks.
4. Highlight Georgia as a key transit country.
5. Identify new opportunities for harnessing transit potential through statistical analysis of cargo transportation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ОСНОВИ

Georgia's transit potential, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, is influenced by a series of global challenges, including geopolitical tensions, energy diversification, changes in trade routes, and technological advancements. It is essential to highlight and distinguish the following aspects of Georgia's transit opportunities:

Geopolitics – Georgia is situated in the heart of the Middle Corridor, connecting Central Asia and China to Europe via the Caucasus and the Black Sea. Instability in traditional routes, such as those passing through Russia, has heightened the importance of this corridor, making Georgia an attractive alternative for global trade flows, especially under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Ongoing regional conflicts (e.g., the Ukraine-Russia conflict) impact the reliability of northern routes, drawing further attention to Georgia's stability and neutrality as a transit hub.

Energy Transit – Georgia plays a critical role in energy transit, particularly as a supplier of oil and gas from the Caspian region to Europe. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline are key infrastructure projects underscoring the country's energy importance. For Europe, which seeks to diversify its energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian energy, Georgia provides an opportunity as a transit route for Caspian energy resources, enhancing its appeal with alternative pipeline routes.

Infrastructure Development – The development of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port will significantly strengthen Georgia's maritime connectivity and complement existing ports, such as Poti and Batumi. Railway projects, like the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, improve land connectivity, linking the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and beyond to Europe. Modernizing logistics and adopting smart infrastructure can further enhance Georgia's efficiency as a transit hub in an increasingly digitalized global trade environment.

Global Trade Shifts – Global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain disruptions, have compelled countries to reassess trade routes. Georgia's geographical location positions it as a valuable alternative for trade flows between Asia and Europe, bypassing traditional chokepoints like the Suez Canal. Moreover, Georgia's relationships with the European Union (via the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement, DCFTA) and its ties with China (via the BRI) enable it to act as a platform connecting major global markets.

Economic Diversification and Local Development – Georgia's transit potential offers opportunities for economic diversification, supporting its ambitions to become a regional logistics hub. This benefits not only large-scale energy transit, but also small businesses involved in logistics, manufacturing,

and services. Initiatives like TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and partnerships with international financial institutions can further enhance Georgia's socio-economic standing.

RESEARCH METHODS / МЕТОДИ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

In this study, both Georgian and foreign literature, various articles, scientific papers, and textbooks relevant to the research topic were utilized. Additionally, official website materials containing updated and credible information were considered. These sources provided a foundation for thorough and multifaceted analysis during the research process, specifically through analytical methods of data collection.

Based on the information obtained from these sources, the research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative methods facilitated the numerical analysis, comparison, and statistical modeling of data, enabling the identification of key trends and dependencies over the years.

Qualitative methods were used for gaining deeper and more detailed insights into the research topic and for better understanding the context of the issue.

The combination of these methods allowed for the integration of information and the development of the final material. By applying generalization methods, conclusions were drawn based on the research results, strengthening the reliability and accuracy of the study's findings.

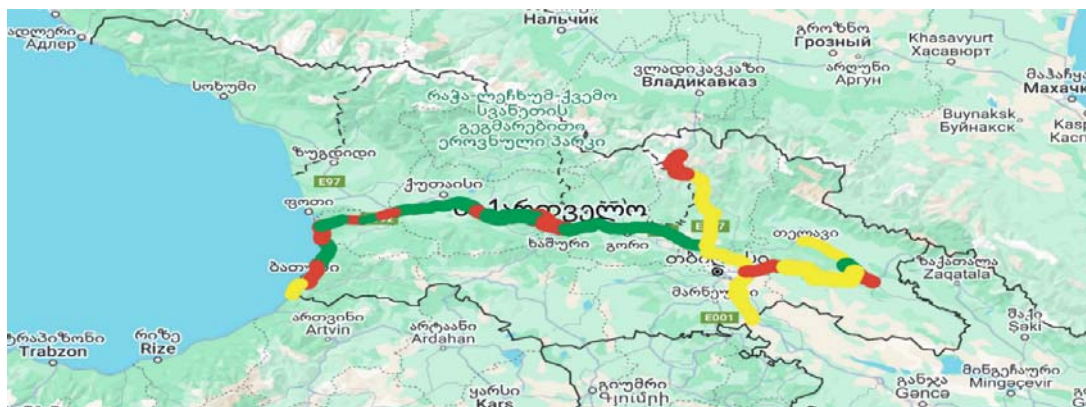
RESEARCH RESULTS / РЕЗУЛЬТАТИ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

It is worth noting, that Georgia's Revenue Service continually strives to simplify transit procedures. One example is the nationwide adoption of the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS) in 2023. The implementation of this system, along with Georgia's accession to the Common Transit Convention (CTC) and the Convention on the Simplification of Formalities in Trade of Goods (SAD), aligns with obligations stemming from the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreement with the European Union.

By joining these conventions and implementing the NCTS, Georgian customs can now allow goods to transit between convention member countries – including the 27 EU states, European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members (Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland), Turkey, Serbia, North Macedonia, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine – under a single transit declaration and guarantee. Starting in 2024, the system is set to launch internationally, enabling all the benefits provided by these agreements, including the unified customs documentation of goods across participating states' territories.

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union, supported by customs administrations from Austria, the Netherlands, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Turkey, has assessed Georgia's readiness to implement NCTS at the international level. In line with the Association Agreement, amendments to Georgian customs legislation have been proposed to comply with new customs obligations.

The development of Georgia as a transit country primarily relies on its location and transport infrastructure network. This network connects the Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi with landlocked countries in the east, such as Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as Turkey in the west. This corridor serves as a vital trade route facilitating the movement of goods and people across the region.



Scheme 1 Road map of Georgia [23]

Georgia boasts a well-developed road network linking its major cities and towns. The East-West Highway, extending from the Black Sea port of Poti to the Azerbaijani border, is particularly notable as it connects Georgia to a broader transit region. Georgia's total network of international roads measures 1,593.4 kilometers (see Scheme 1).



Scheme 2 Map of railways of Georgia [9]

When it comes to railways, the Georgian Railway constitutes a crucial segment of the transit corridor. Its mainline stretches from the Black Sea port of Poti to the Azerbaijani border, further connecting Armenia and Turkey through other railway networks.

Georgia is also an integral part of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), a multimodal transport system that connects China to Europe via the Caspian Sea. The infrastructure of Georgian Railways encompasses tracks with a total length of 1,992 kilometers. Out of this, the length of the main tracks is 1,441.66 km, single-track sections cover 850 km, while double-track sections span 294.84 km. Additionally, station tracks measure 563.16 km, and access tracks extend 79.17 km.



Scheme 3 Trans-Caspian International Transport Road [30]

A significant example is the Middle Corridor, also known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR). This route is a critical trade artery linking China to Europe through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus (via Georgia), and Turkey. It serves as an alternative to the Northern Corridor, which traverses Russia, and the Southern Corridor, which passes through Iran. Given the escalating geopolitical tensions, particularly after the war in Ukraine, the Middle Corridor has gained prominence as a reliable and strategic transit pathway. The main components of the Middle Corridor include:

1. China to Kazakhstan – by rail.
2. Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan – via ferry across the Caspian Sea.
3. Azerbaijan to Georgia – by rail through Baku and then the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway.
4. Georgia to Turkey and onward to Europe – either by rail or through Georgian ports, such as Poti and Batumi, for maritime transport.

Georgia has gained numerous advantages through the Middle Corridor:

1. **Increased Geopolitical Significance:** Situated as a pivotal link between the Caspian and Black Seas, Georgia's geopolitical importance continues to grow. The Middle Corridor offers an alternative global trade route that bypasses Russia and Iran, positioning Georgia as a key player in East-West logistics.

2. **Enhanced Transit Traffic:** Due to sanctions and political tensions affecting trade flows through Russia, Georgia has experienced increased transit activity. Trade statistics indicate a notable rise in container shipments from China to Europe via the Middle Corridor. Georgia has the potential to capitalize on this growing trend, which could benefit its logistics, manufacturing, service, and real estate sectors.

Small and medium-sized businesses involved in transportation, customs brokerage, warehousing, and related services stand to benefit significantly from the increased movement of goods along this corridor. Railway freight turnover data from 2020–2024 illustrates the growth trend.

An analysis of railway freight turnover from 2020 to 2024 reveals that a total of 16,263,641 thousand tons of freight was transported, of which 12,062,087 thousand tons (74 %) accounted for transit procedures. Transit consistently represented the largest share annually: 69 % in 2020, 73 % in 2021, 76 % in 2022, 75 % in 2023, and 78 % in the first two quarters of 2024.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 had a significant impact on Georgia's transit role, leading to a 126 % increase in railway freight turnover compared to 2021. In 2022, the total transported freight reached a five-year record of 4,193,200 thousand tons, including domestic and international shipments, exports, imports, and transit. These figures highlight that transit remains the most crucial form of freight transportation via Georgia's railway system.

Table 1

**Railway cargo turnover according to types of transportation
2020–2024-thousand-ton km [19]**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Year	Year	Year	Year	I-II quarter
Cargo turnover, total	2 925 583,5	3 322 181,4	4 193 200,4	3 839 588,8	1 983 087,1
Local shipping	199 404,2	178 937,8	189 958,5	206 710,6	101 310,6
International shipping	710 696,3	710 720,5	819 053,3	747 052,5	337 709,8
Cargo removal	298 069,6	307 496,3	365 429,8	334 220,4	153 462,8
Bringing cargo	412 626,7	403 224,2	453 623,5	412 832,1	184 247,1
transit	2 015 483,0	2 432 523,1	3 184 188,6	2 885 825,7	1 544 066,7

As repeatedly emphasized, Georgia's transit corridor serves as a primary transport route connecting Europe and Asia, playing a pivotal role in facilitating the movement of goods across international borders. This is supported by the strategic location of the transit corridors within Georgia.

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia embarked on a new developmental path, attracting increased regional and international interest. During the 1990s, despite political instability adversely affecting the economy, the country consistently maintained its status as a focal point of interest. Over time, Georgia established itself as a major transit bridge within the Eurasian continent.

To better understand this context, it is essential to examine the existing conditions and review the transit corridors that have supported this development. Today, based on international practice, Georgia is recognized as a key transport/transit hub connecting Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Let us begin with an overview of the TRACECA Corridor, whose primary aim is the development of railways, highways, seaports, and terminals, connecting them with European corridors. Another objective is the reconstruction of the historic Silk Road. The TRACECA program's history dates to 1993 in Brussels, where the European Commission organized a conference resulting in the adoption of a declaration and the creation of the TRACECA regional program.

TRACECA Program: TRACECA stands for the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia. Member countries of this international cooperation program include Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Iran, Moldova, Romania, Georgia, Armenia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the 27 member states of the European Union.



Scheme 4 TRACECA route in Georgia [34]

East-West Energy Corridor: Parallel to the TRACECA program, a process was initiated to export oil to international markets via Georgia. This effort began with an agreement signed between Georgia and Azerbaijan in 1996, which led to the construction of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline.

In 1999, two major developments occurred simultaneously: the completion of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline and the commissioning of the Poti ferry-railway terminal. Together, these initiatives significantly improved Georgia's transit capabilities and its position on the regional stage.

The Western Route Export Pipeline (WREP), also known as the Baku-Supsa Pipeline, represents the first investment by the International Oil Consortium in Georgia. The pipeline transports crude oil and serves as a critical component of the South Caucasus energy network, offering an alternative route to Western markets. The pipeline spans 833 km, with 375 km running through Georgian territory, following the same route as the Soviet-era Samgori-Batumi oil pipeline. Its capacity is approximately 145,000 barrels of oil per day.

Additionally, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline is notable as the first and shortest route connecting the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas for oil transportation. The primary goal of the BTC pipeline was to transport Azerbaijani oil independently of Russia. The pipeline became the first in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to bypass Russia, reducing its regional influence through U.S. and U.K. support.

The BTC pipeline, a vital part of the South Caucasus energy corridor, facilitates a direct route for Caspian oil products to Western markets. Its construction began in 2002, with operations starting in 2006. The pipeline is approximately 1,768 km long and has a capacity of 1 million barrels of oil per day.



Fig. 1 Oil transit, million t / year 2020-2024 [10]

The diagram illustrates the transport volumes of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Supsa (WREP) pipelines across various years (2020-2024). Transportation via the BTC pipeline has shown consistent growth, while transportation via the WREP pipeline has experienced a significant decline in recent years. The following trends have been identified:

- BTC Pipeline:
 - In 2021, transportation decreased by 4.3% compared to 2020 (27.6 - > 26.4 million barrels).
 - In 2022, transportation increased by 12.9 % compared to 2021 (26.4- > 29.8 million barrels).
 - In 2023, transportation increased by 1.3 % compared to 2022 (29.8 > 30.2 million barrels).
 - 2024 (Q1-Q2): Transportation decreased by 11.6 % in the first two quarters compared to the same period in 2023 (30.2- > 26.7 million barrels). However, these figures are subject to revision once the data for Q3 and Q4 is received.
- WREP Pipeline (Baku-Supsa):
 - In 2021, transportation remained unchanged from 2020 at 4.2 million barrels.
 - In 2022, transportation decreased by 76.2 % compared to 2021 (4.2- > 1.0 million barrels).
 - In 2023, transportation decreased by 90 % compared to 2022 (1.0- > 0.1 million barrels).

It is evident that the BTC pipeline has shown steady annual growth, with transport volumes declining only once in the past five years – in 2021. Conversely, the WREP pipeline has faced significant reductions since 2022, with the downward trend continuing into 2023 and 2024. By the first two months of 2024, WREP transport volumes had dropped to zero.

It is equally important to analyze gas transit routes. Georgia facilitates the annual transit of natural gas via two main pipelines:

1. SCP (South Caucasus Pipeline):

The South Caucasus Pipeline transports gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field to Turkey and Europe. It traverses the territories of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, making it a critical energy security route for the region. The SCP's capacity and transported volumes have increased yearly, reflecting the rising demand for natural gas in Europe.

2. NSGP (North-South Gas Pipeline):

The North-South Gas Pipeline project is designed to supply gas to Georgia's domestic market while also enabling gas transit from the northern to

southern regions. The NSGP operates steadily, providing a reliable option for gas distribution within and across Georgian territories.



Fig. 2 Natural gas transit, million m³ / year [10]

The diagram illustrates the gas volumes transported by the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) and the North-South Gas Pipeline (NSGP) in million cubic meters (mln m³) from 2020 to 2023. The following trends have been identified:

SCP (South Caucasus Pipeline):

- In 2021, transportation via SCP increased by 48.9 % compared to 2020.
- In 2022, transportation increased by 19.6 % compared to 2021.
- In 2023, transportation increased by 8.3 % compared to 2022.

NSGP (North-South Gas Pipeline):

- In 2021, transportation via NSGP increased by 11.0 % compared to 2020.
- In 2022, transportation increased by 6.0 % compared to 2021.
- In 2023, transportation decreased by 9.2 % compared to 2022.

The increase in transit procedures is also reflected in the rise of road usage fees. For freight vehicles transporting goods in transit, a fee is established as follows:

“A road usage fee is charged for the transportation of goods in transit under customs control/supervision within the customs territory of Georgia or for goods intended for re-export from the customs territory of Georgia (except for goods subjected to inward processing or temporary import procedures, or in cases where it is determined that goods released for free circulation are defective, or their quantity, quality, packaging, or description does not comply with the terms of the foreign economic transaction and, as a result, they are

returned to the supplier or another person designated by them). The road usage fee is set at 350 GEL per freight vehicle” [Revenue Service, 2022].

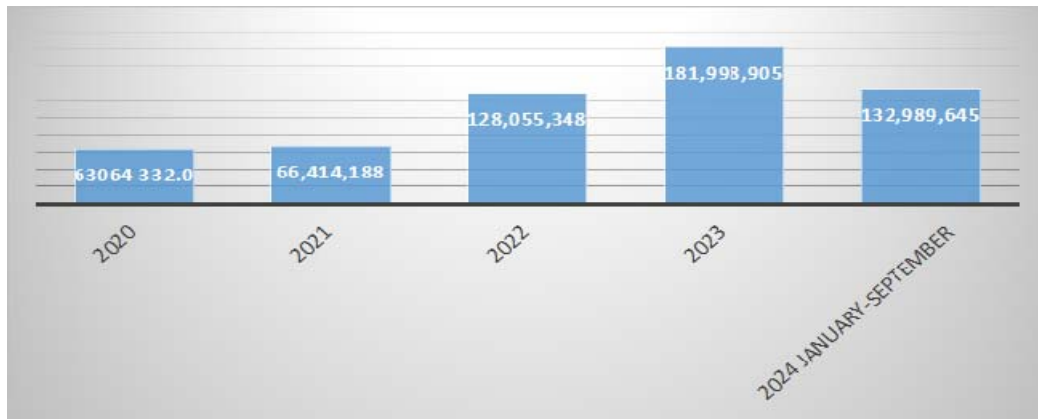


Fig. 3 The amount mobilized by the road usage fee in the state budget [27]

Starting June 20, 2022, the road usage fee, which increased from 150 GEL to 350 GEL per transit declaration, contributes to the consolidation of funds in the state budget. These funds are subsequently allocated to support the development of the transport sector, freight logistics, and transit infrastructure. To better understand the significance of this fee, we can compare its impact on the state budget over the past five years.

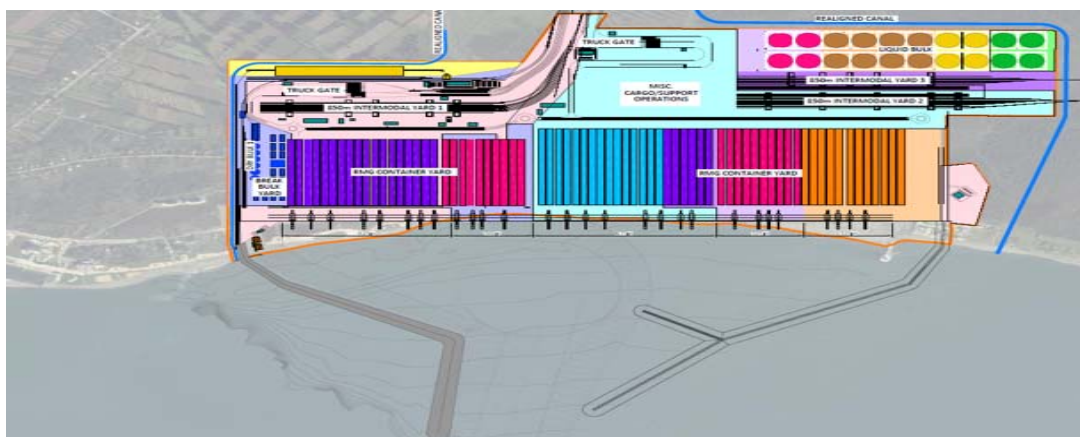
The diagram illustrates the funds mobilized in the state budget through road usage fees from 2020 to 2024.

- In 2020, 63,064,332 GEL was mobilized.
- In 2021, the amount increased to 66,414,188 GEL, marking a 5.3 % growth compared to 2020.
- In 2022, mobilized funds sharply increased to 128,055,348 GEL, reflecting a 92.7 % growth compared to 2021, likely due to the increase in fee rates.
- In 2023, the growth continued, with the amount reaching 181,998,905 GEL, a 42 % increase compared to 2022.
- For 2024 (January through August), 132,989,645 GEL has already been mobilized, suggesting that by year-end, this figure could match or exceed 2023 levels.

It is evident that the funds mobilized through road usage fees have increased annually, particularly in 2022 and 2023, which is likely tied to the rise in fee amounts. These trends indicate the growing importance of road usage fees for the state budget, potentially supporting infrastructure projects or improvements in the transportation sector.

It is crucial to highlight the Anaklia Deep-Sea Port, which is poised to become a significant transport and trade hub for Georgia. Anaklia will be Georgia's first deep-sea port, equipped with modern technologies and high-quality infrastructure, enhancing its productivity, reliability, and efficiency. The project will be developed in nine phases, with a total investment of \$2.5 billion. The port's depth will reach 16 meters, allowing it to accommodate vessels carrying up to 10,000 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units).

Anaklia will serve the Caucasus region (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia) and Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), encompassing a potential market of 147 million customers. Strategically located on a historically significant trade route, it will form a key node on the new Silk Road, connecting China and Europe. The port's location, technical capabilities, and infrastructure will be primary factors in attracting cargo traffic.



Scheme 5 All (9) phases of Anaklia Port [1]

It should also be noted that Georgia joined the TIR Convention on September 24, 1994 (without ratification). This convention regulates international road transport among member countries in terms of both customs and technical procedures, proving highly beneficial for Georgia. The convention simplified the inspection of goods, the verification of documents, and the guarantee of customs duty payments.

According to Article 118, paragraph 3 of Tax Code Of Georgia, if the transportation begins and ends outside Georgia's customs territory, the TIR Convention allows the transit procedure to facilitate the movement of foreign goods between two points within Georgia's customs territory. By order of the Minister of Finance, under the TIR Convention, customs authorities may grant the applicant permission to deliver goods to a pre-agreed location. Once this permission is obtained, the applicant becomes an authorized carrier for the cargo.

The TIR system has significantly contributed to Georgia's economic development and facilitated cross-border trade. It enables the efficient and secure movement of goods across international borders. By reducing the time and cost associated with customs procedures and inspections at border crossings, the TIR system promotes trade and simplifies business participation in international commerce. This has increased Georgia's trade volume and improved the competitiveness of its exports.

The TIR system requires well-maintained transport infrastructure, including roads, border crossings, and logistics services, to operate effectively and implement transit procedures. Its introduction spurred investments in Georgia's transport infrastructure, such as the construction of new highways, modernization of border checkpoints, and enhancement of logistics and transport services. These developments have made Georgia's infrastructure more efficient and reliable, which is crucial for the country's economic growth.

Table 2

Turnover volume of enterprises engaged in transport and warehousing activities according to types of activity 2020-2024 [19]

Year	Quarter	Total	including:				
			Land transport and pipeline transport	water transport	air transport	Warehousing and supporting transport activities	Postal and courier activities
		million Lari					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
2020	-	5 778,4	2 091,9	117,3	323,3	3 106,3	139,7
2021	-	6 985,7	2 297,0	205,0	519,6	3 774,3	189,8
2022	-	9 302,3	3 266,7	134,9	684,2	4 980,6	235,8
2023	-	9 425,3	3 501,9	68,1	522,1	5 065,1	268,1
2024	I	2 140,9	827,0	22,6	158,5	1 065,6	67,2
	II	2 521,0	917,8	13,8	231,0	1 282,3	76,1

Additionally, the TIR system has facilitated business operations for foreign companies in Georgia by ensuring secure and efficient transport routes for their goods. This has attracted foreign investments to Georgia's economy, particularly in manufacturing, logistics, and transport sectors. As a result, it has created jobs, facilitated technology and knowledge transfer, and diversified Georgia's economy.

Strategically located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia has leveraged the TIR system to foster greater regional integration and trade between these regions. This has increased economic cooperation and investment opportunities for Georgia. The impact of the TIR Carnet on Georgia is reflected in the annual growth of turnover in enterprises engaged in transport and warehousing activities.

The table reflects changes in turnover across various activities within the transport and warehousing sector during the period of 2020–2024. Based on the data, it is evident that from 2020 to 2023, most of the turnover in this sector originated from warehousing and auxiliary transportation services. Additionally, it should be noted that the total turnover has increased annually.

- In 2021, turnover rose from 5,778.4 million GEL in 2020 to 6,985.7 million GEL, representing a 20.9 % growth compared to the previous year. This growth indicates positive dynamics and increasing demand within the sector.
- In 2022, turnover grew even more significantly, reaching 9,302.3 million GEL, a 33.1 % increase compared to 2021.
- In 2023, turnover remained nearly unchanged at 9,425.3 million GEL, reflecting only a 1.3 % growth compared to 2022. This suggests that growth slowed in 2023, leaving the sector in a relatively stable condition.
- For 2024 (Q1-Q2), the total turnover for the first two quarters amounted to 4,661.9 million GEL. This provides a basis for forecasting that the enterprises engaged in transport and warehousing activities are experiencing stability.

Strategic Importance of Georgia in the Middle Corridor

Georgia's strategic importance lies in its position within the Middle Corridor, connecting Asia to Europe via the South Caucasus and creating potential synergy with international routes. However, this position is potentially threatened by the issue of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Nakhchivan is an autonomous republic of Azerbaijan, isolated from the main part of Azerbaijan and surrounded by Armenia, Iran, and Turkey. Due to its location, the region has frequently been at the center of conflicts in the Caucasus. After the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed to open transportation routes, enabling the restoration of transport connections to Nakhchivan. If the corridor is opened, regional players may become interested in utilizing it, potentially reducing Georgia's transport load.

The potential opening of a transport corridor related to Nakhchivan poses a significant threat to Georgia, as it could weaken its transit role and alter the balance of power in the region. If the "Zangezur Corridor," connecting Nakhchivan to the rest of Azerbaijan, is opened, Azerbaijan and Turkey would no

longer need to use Georgia's transport routes via Armenia. This would substantially reduce Georgia's transit significance.



Scheme 6 The Zangezur Corridor [32]

Such a development could lead to a shift in freight flows from Turkey and Azerbaijan, resulting in a decline in Georgia's economic revenues due to reduced transport fees and services. Furthermore, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor could negatively impact the regional balance of power. The increased activity and control by Azerbaijan and Turkey over regional transport links would diminish Georgia's influence in the South Caucasus transit market.

This scenario poses a particular risk if Georgia fails to secure alternative and reliable partners within the region to mitigate the potential economic and strategic impacts.

CONCLUSIONS / ВИСНОВКИ

Thus, as seen in the case of Georgia, the country's geographical location and the transportation/transit opportunities established on it play a central role in the functioning of the transit route and the formation of the country's geo-economic positioning. Additionally, our country is a key transit state in the region, on which much depends. Such a location has always imposed a full set of responsibilities in Georgia, ensuring that it occupies an important place in the global development process.

One of the key achievements of Georgia's transit corridors is that it enables the country to engage in global trade, establish economic relations with developed countries, and serve as a major bridge between two significant regions – Europe and Asia. Against the backdrop of assimilating these unique characteristics, the country gains an entire cascade of benefits and is given the opportunity to improve its social conditions.

The role of Georgia's transit corridors is of vital importance for the country's economic and political development. As mentioned earlier, these corridors are not only a link between different countries but also provide the opportunity to become a leader in international trade and cargo turnover, establishing our country as a key player not only in the Caucasus but globally. This acts as a connecting leverage between Georgia and the developed world.

Furthermore, it should be noted that after Georgia joined the TIR Convention, the transit procedure in the country was simplified and clearly defined. With the introduction of TIR carnets, goods are precisely and in detail recorded, allowing customs authorities to monitor transit procedures within the country in an expedited manner. In fact, the signature on the convention has provided our country with new opportunities and challenges, which have undoubtedly played and continue to play a positive role in economic development. The existence of the TIR carnet has laid the foundation for the growth of transit procedures, which is directly proportional to an increase in revenue, thus helping Georgia become an economically resilient state.

It is also noteworthy and important to highlight the dynamic nature of transit freight transport, which indicates that the volume of transited goods in the country is steadily increasing. This is happening through various modes of transportation, such as rail and road transport. We have also analyzed that Georgia's main transit partners are neighboring countries, such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, and Russia. However, it should be noted that we represent a transit corridor for countries from Western Europe, Asia, or even entirely different continents (Germany, China, the USA).

As previously discussed, and noted, the Revenue Service plays a significant role in simplifying, establishing, and developing transit processes. This is evidenced by the fact that, starting this year, the customs authority plans to launch a new computerized transit system, which will automate the transit procedure and further simplify the process. Initially, this system will be regional, but it will soon be extended to international levels.

Prospects for further research in this direction / Перспективи подальших досліджень у цьому напрямі. In conclusion, will summarize and state that this work fully presents the importance of Georgia's transit corridors, their development processes, opportunities, innovations, legal regulations, and the role, essence, and significance of the TIR carnet in these processes. Overall, the trends of progress, the complexity of the system, and the signs of simplification of transit procedures have been highlighted, ensuring that Georgia's current transit situation is highly regarded and has *significant prospects*.

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ПАРАДИГМИ ТРАНЗИТНОГО ПОТЕНЦІАЛУ ГРУЗІЇ В КОНТЕКСТІ СУЧАСНИХ ГЛОБАЛЬНИХ ВИКЛИКІВ

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Анотація. З плином століть глобальна цивілізація продовжує розвиватися, сприяючи прогресу процесів глобалізації. Отже, сучасне суспільство є свідком дедалі більшої конвергенції соціальних, економічних, політичних і демографічних процесів, що посилює значення міжнародної економічної діяльності між державами. На всіх етапах цивілізаційного розвитку першочергове значення мали торгово-транспортні відносини між державами. У сучасному контексті це стає ще більш помітним, оскільки транспортування товарів, транзит і митні процедури служать механізмами формування економічних, соціальних і політичних відносин між націями. Крім того, вони підтримують країни, що розвиваються, в утвердженні на регіональних і міжнародних торгових ринках. Грузія не є винятком. Історично це була значна частина Шовкового шляху, яка з'єднувала Схід і Захід, сприяла обміну товарами, культурою та ідеями. Стратегічне розташування країни на перехресті Східної Європи та Західної Азії відіграє життєво важливу роль у регіональних і міжнародних перевезеннях і торгівлі. Грузія є ключовим з'єднувачем, що з'єднує історично відмінні між собою Європу та Азію. Таким чином, транзитний коридор Грузії стає ключовим елементом регіональних і міжнародних транспортних і торгових мереж. Основною метою цієї наукової роботи є визначення важливості Грузії як основної транзитної країни в контексті значних соціально-економічних подій останніх років. Предметом цього дослідження є поточний стан транзитного потенціалу Грузії, включаючи вантажі, які перевозяться транзитом, і роль системи книжок МДП (Міжнародні дорожні перевезення) у цих процесах. Об'єктом дослідження є транзитний коридор Грузії та його гео економічні реалії. Грузія активно розвиває транзитну інфраструктуру для подальшого посилення своєї ролі регіонального та міжнародного транзитного вузла. Її стратегічне розташування на перехресті Європи та Азії, у поєднанні з поточними інфраструктурними проектами та зусиллями щодо покращення транспортного сполучення, позиціонує Грузію як провідного гравця у розвитку транзиту. Країна налагодила

зв'язки з сусідніми державами – Вірменією, Азербайджаном і Туреччиною, а також із великими торговими державами, такими як США, Китай і країни Східної Європи.

Ключові слова: транзит; транзитна система Грузії; транзитні коридори; система книжок МДП; переміщення вантажів; транзитний потенціал.

TRANSLATED AND TRANSLITERATED / ПЕРЕКЛАД, ТРАНСЛІТЕРАЦІЯ

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