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Dergi Ana Sayfası

Hakkında

Amaç ve Kapsam

Makale Gönder

Dergi Kurulları

İstatistikler

Yazım Kuralları

Etik İlkeler ve Yayın Politikası

Ücret Politikası

Dizinler

Arşiv

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Dergimizin dördüncü sayısı, 8–9 Mayıs 2025 tarihlerinde Marmara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi'nde düzenlenen **8. Uluslararası Mavi Karadeniz Kongresi**'nde sunulan bildirilerin, hakem sürecinden geçirilerek makale formatına dönüştürülmüş seçkin örneklerinden oluşmaktadır. Bu yönüyle sayı, Karadeniz ve Avrasya merkezli deniz jeopolitiği, enerji, ticaret, güvenlik ve uluslararası ilişkiler alanlarındaki güncel akademik tartışmaları yansıtmaktadır.

Bu sayıda yer alan makaleler; Afganistan'ın yeni döneminde bölgesel güç dengeleri, Filistin'in Birleşmiş Milletler'deki statüsü, enerji altyapılarının siyasal güç unsuru olarak kullanımı, Orta Koridor'un Avrasya ticaretindeki rolü, Karadeniz'in iklim temelli lojistik ve stratejik dönüşümü, Kuşak ve Yol İnisiyatifi bağlamında Anaklia Limanı, Hazar enerji hatlarının jeopolitik evrimi ve Karadeniz ülkelerinin Avrupa güvenliğindeki konumu gibi başlıklara odaklanmaktadır.

Dördüncü sayımızın, denizcilik alanındaki akademik çalışmalara ve stratejik tartışmalara katkı sağlaması temennisiyle; emeği geçen tüm yazarlarımıza, hakemlerimize, alan editörlerimize ve yayın kurulumuza teşekkür eder, bir sonraki sayımızda yeniden buluşmayı dileriz.

Saygılarımızla,

Doç. Dr. Hakan ARIDEMİR
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Zeynep BOSTAN

İstanbul-2025

İÇİNDEKİLER

1. ***AFGANİSTAN'IN YENİ DÖNEMİNDE KURUMSAL FAKTÖRLER, EKONOMİK BÜYÜME VE BÖLGESEL GÜÇ DENGELERİ: TÜRKİYE VE RUSYA PERSPEKTİFİ***
   Abdulkarim AZIZI……Sayfa: 1-19

2. ***PALESTINE AS A NON-MEMBER STATE AT THE UNITED NATIONS: DIMENSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS***
   Alaeddin YALÇINKAYA, Shaymaa BDRAN……Sayfa: 20-30

3. ***NAVIGATING ASYMMETRY: ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE AS POLITICAL CAPITAL FOR SMALL AND MIDDLE POWERS***
   Ayşe İrem AYCAN ÖZER……Sayfa: 31-41

4. ***AVRASYA TİCARET ROTALARININ DÖNÜŞÜMÜNDE ORTA KORİDOR ANALİZİ***
   Gökhan KATITAŞ……Sayfa: 42-70

5. ***KUZEY VE DOĞU ARASINDA KARADENİZ: İKLİM TEMELLİ LOJİSTİK VE STRATEJİK YÖNELİMLER***
   Gözde KÜÇÜK KARA……Sayfa: 71-82

6. ***KUŞAK VE YOL İNİSİYATİFİ KAPSAMINDA GÜRCİSTAN-ÇİN HALK CUMHURİYETİ İLİŞKİLERİ: ANAKLİA LİMANI ÖRNEĞİ***
   İsmail KARAMAN……Sayfa: 83-96

7. ***THE GEOPOLITICAL EVOLUTION OF CASPIAN ENERGY EXPORTS FROM THE HISTORICAL BAKU-BATUMI PIPELINE TO BTC AND TANAP***
   Meral BALCI, Abdulla KHANAYEV……Sayfa: 97-108

8. ***AVRUPA GÜVENLİĞİNDE KARADENİZ ÜLKELERİNİN ROLÜ***
   Nurgül BEKAR……Sayfa: 109-124

THE GEOPOLITICAL EVOLUTION OF CASPIAN ENERGY EXPORTS FROM THE HISTORICAL BAKU-BATUMI PIPELINE TO BTC AND TANAP[*1]

TARİHSEL BAKÜ-BATUM HATTI'NDAN BTC VE TANAP'A HAZAR ENERJİ İHRACATININ JEOPOLİTİK EVRİMİ

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ÖZ Bakü-Batum Boru Hattı'nın inşası, 19. yüzyılın sonlarında Azerbaycan'ın başkenti Bakü'den Gürcistan'ın Batum limanına petrol taşımak amacıyla başlatılmıştır. Bu hat, Hazar petrollerinin uluslararası piyasalara erişimini sağlayarak bölgesel enerji jeopolitiğinde kritik bir rol üstlenmiş, Azerbaycan'ın petrol endüstrisinin gelişimine katkı sağlamış ve bölgedeki ekonomik aktivitelerin canlanmasında etkili olmuştur. Bu çalışma, söz konusu boru hattını tarihsel, ekonomik ve jeopolitik boyutlarıyla analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Araştırma kapsamında, 1883-1907 dönemindeki inşa süreci, Nobel Kardeşler ile Rothschild Ailesi gibi küresel aktörlerin rollerinin yanı sıra Osmanlı-Rus-İngiliz rekabeti (Büyük Oyun) ve bölgesel enerji ticaretinin küresel sisteme entegrasyonu üzerindeki etkileri incelenmiştir. Çalışma, dönemin arşiv belgeleri, akademik literatür ve karşılaştırmalı analiz yöntemiyle desteklenmiş; tarihsel olayların güncel enerji dinamikleriyle ilişkisi disiplinlerarası bir perspektifle yorumlanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, projenin Batum'u küresel ölçekte bir petrol terminaline dönüştürdüğünü, İngiltere'nin Rus petrol kaynaklarına erişim stratejisini şekillendirdiğini ve günümüz enerji projeleri (BTC, TANAP) için bir öncül teşkil ettiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca, Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı'nın tetiklediği enerji güvenliği arayışları bağlamında Karadeniz'in alternatif bir enerji koridoru olarak yeniden önem kazanması, tarihsel süreklilik perspektifiyle tartışılmıştır. Çalışma, sürdürülebilir enerji politikalarının tasarımında tarihten çıkarılacak dersler ile bölgesel işbirliği modellerine yönelik önerilerle sonlandırılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bakü-Batum Boru Hattı, Bölgesel İş Birliği, Büyük Oyun, Enerji Jeopolitiği, Hazar Petrolleri.
Jel Kodu: N70, Q34, Q43

ABSTRACT The construction of the Baku-Batumi Pipeline was initiated in the late 19th century to transport oil from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to the port of Batumi in Georgia. This pipeline assumed a critical role in regional energy geopolitics by facilitating access to Caspian oil for international markets, contributed to the development of Azerbaijan's oil industry, and effectively stimulated economic activities in the region. This study aims to analyze the pipeline through historical, economic, and geopolitical dimensions. Within the scope of the research, the construction process between 1883 and 1907, the roles of global actors such as the Nobel Brothers and the Rothschild Family, the Ottoman-Russian-British rivalry (The Great Game), and the impacts of regional energy trade on its integration into the global system were examined. Supported by archival documents, secondary sources, and comparative analysis, the study systematically revealed the pipeline's transformative impact on the energy geopolitics of the Black Sea. The findings demonstrated that the project transformed Batumi into a global-scale oil terminal, shaped Britain's strategy for accessing Russian oil resources, and served as a precursor to modern energy projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline and the Trans-Anadolu Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP). Additionally, the resurgence of the Black Sea as an alternative energy corridor in the context of energy security concerns triggered by the Russia-Ukraine War was discussed from a historical continuity perspective. The study concludes with lessons drawn from history for designing sustainable energy policies and proposals for regional cooperation models.

Keywords: Baku-Batumi Pipeline, Caspian Oil Resources, Energy Geopolitics, Regional Cooperation, The Great Game.

JEL Codes: N70, Q34, Q43

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[1] Bu çalışma, 8–9 Mayıs 2025 tarihlerinde Marmara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi'nde düzenlenen **8. Uluslararası Mavi Karadeniz Kongresi**'nde "**Baku-Batumi Pipeline: Historical Development, Regional Impacts, and Contemporary Reflections**" başlığıyla sunulan bildirinin gözden geçirilmiş ve genişletilmiş hâlidir.

1. INTRODUCTION

The control of energy resources and their integration into international markets has been a decisive factor in shaping the modern state system. The increased demand for energy following the Industrial Revolution significantly increased the geopolitical value of fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas, and energy infrastructure projects became a fundamental component of states' strategic planning (Khanayev, 2024: 7). In this context, the Baku-Batumi Pipeline, constructed in the last quarter of the 19th century, stands out not only as a technical engineering achievement but also as a turning point that redefined the geopolitical dynamics of global energy trade. This project, which aimed to integrate the rich oil reserves of the Caspian Basin into European markets via the Black Sea, pushed the technological boundaries of the era and was shaped at the intersection of international capital and political power. The industrial vision of the Nobel Brothers and the financial networks of the Rothschild family made the construction of the pipeline possible between 1883 and 1907, but this process also deepened the strategic competition among the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Tsardom, and the British Empire, known as the "Great Game". To examine this strategic tension at a theoretical level, our study draws on classical approaches to geopolitics. In particular, land power theories (Heartland and Rimland) explain why control of key points in the Eurasian geography (such as the Caucasus and the Black Sea) is at the center of the global power struggle. The Baku-Batumi line can be interpreted as an effort to extend Russian power to the sea by transporting energy resources from Russia's interior regions, seen as the 'Heartland' (land dominance), to the port of Batumi on the 'Rimland' (peripheral belt), the lifeblood of global trade. British strategy, on the other hand, aimed to prevent Eurasia's energy resources from being monopolized by a single land power by controlling the commercial flow of this route and balancing influence in the Black Sea. In this context, the pipeline is analyzed not merely as an engineering project but also as a concrete instrument of the geopolitical and geoeconomic objectives of the "Great Game". This theoretical perspective will enable us to understand the underlying security and diversity concerns that also underpin modern energy corridors such as BTC and TANAP.

The economic impact of the Baku-Batumi Pipeline transcended the regional scale and took on a global character. The transformation of the Port of Batumi into an oil terminal during this process influenced not only the Caucasus but also the determination of oil prices traded on the London Stock Exchange. The role of Russian oil in meeting the energy needs of the British Industrial Revolution made the pipeline an integral part of Britain's imperial strategy. On the other hand, the logistical challenges of the project-laying pipelines in mountainous terrain, the efficiency of steam pumps, and labour mobilization-tested the engineering capabilities of the time and set a benchmark for future projects in this field.

Today, the legacy of the Baku-Batumi Pipeline is felt in the design of modern energy corridors such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP). Like their historical predecessors, these projects reflect the tension between energy security and geopolitical interests. In particular, the energy crisis triggered by the Russia-Ukraine War has led to the Black Sea being re-evaluated as an alternative energy corridor, bringing the region's historical role to the forefront of current politics. In this context, this study carves out a unique place in the literature by analyzing historical and contemporary energy infrastructure projects in a comparative manner. The emphasis on lessons that can be drawn from the past regarding energy geopolitics and the sustainability of infrastructure projects reinforces the unique contribution of the study. By examining the parallels between historical and modern projects, this analysis fills gaps in the literature and offers a new perspective, providing an original contribution to the academic literature.

The study is structured in three main sections: The first section examines the historical development of the Baku-Batumi Pipeline in the context of 19th-century oil competition (the roles of the Nobel Brothers and the Rothschild family) and technical challenges in mountainous terrain. The second section analyses Batumi's transformation into a global oil terminal, Ottoman-Russian-British competition, and the geopolitical effects of the "Great Game". The third section examines the historical similarities among modern energy corridors (BTC, TANAP), the transformation of the Black Sea into an alternative energy route due to the Russia-Ukraine War, and the historical legacy of the EU's energy strategies. Supported by archival documents and comparative analysis, this study aims to establish critical connections between the past and the future in energy policies.

2. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION PROCESS OF THE BAKU-BATUMI PIPELINE

The 19th century was a period marked by the acceleration of the Industrial Revolution and the transformative role of global demand for energy resources. During this period, the oil industry in Azerbaijan, then part of the Russian Empire, began to develop rapidly due to state policies and technological innovations. The increase in oil production on the Absheron Peninsula led to a parallel increase in the transportation of oil and its derivatives, necessitating developments in transportation methods. In 1878, the construction of Russia's first oil pipeline from the Balakhani field near Baku to refineries marked a turning point in the sector. By 1895, the total length of oil pipelines in Baku had reached 317 kilometres, and more than 200,000 poods of oil per day were being transported safely through these pipelines (Movsumzade, 2002: 162-163).

The global significance of Baku's oil reserves and the transformation of Baku into a centre of the oil industry began with the interest of local and foreign oil investors. This transformation gained momentum thanks to the forward-thinking investments and technological innovations introduced by local financiers such as Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev, Musa Nagiyev and Murtuza Muhtarov. These individuals pioneered integrated applications that harnessed the Caucasus's abundant oil reserves, streamlining extraction, processing, and transportation processes. In doing so, they played a pivotal role in fostering the emergence of a dynamic national bourgeois class that drove Baku's economic and urban development. In particular, investments made in the region in the 1870s by Swedish engineer Ludvig Nobel and his brothers, as well as important foreign investors such as the Rothschild family, accelerated technological development in the oil industry and further increased the international recognition of Baku oil (Ismailov, 2017: 215). The Nobel brothers established the Branobel Company to refine crude oil using modern techniques at the oil wells in Baku, thereby bringing the energy potential of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus to the attention of international capital. At the same time, the Nobels entered into active partnerships with local companies to bring in advanced technologies and expand production capacity. Their roles in infrastructure development and extraction operations accelerated the commercialisation of Baku oil, integrating it into the broader framework of the global energy economy (Seits, 2023: 58). The Rothschild family completed this process by investing in logistics networks that enabled oil exports to European markets through their financial influence and strategic vision (Nusretoğlu, 2021: 1025).

On the other hand, as part of this process, infrastructure and logistics projects became necessary to ensure and increase the export of Baku oil to European markets via the Black Sea. Considering the technological and logistical developments of the time, it is possible to say that the most pressing need was a railway line connecting Baku to the port of Batumi. Although the idea of a railway project to address this need was first proposed in the early 1830s, practical work did not begin until the mid-1850s. However, financial constraints led Tsarist Russia to

adopt a phased approach to construction. In 1865, contrary to earlier plans, the South Caucasus railway project began not in Baku but in Poti, a port city in Georgia. The 310-kilometre Poti-Tiflis line was completed in 1872, followed by the approval of the 548-kilometre Baku-Tiflis line in 1879. Direct railway service from Baku to Batumi began in May 1883 (Gorshkov and Bagaturia, 2000: 42). At that time, oil was transported to the Black Sea port of Batumi via this railway; however, this method began to prove inadequate in the face of increasing production volumes. The need to reduce transportation costs and increase capacity were the main drivers behind the idea of constructing a pipeline. In this context, the proposal for 'integrated oil logistics via pipelines' put forward by the famous Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev in 1863 provided a theoretical framework for the industrialists of the time. Mendeleev argued that transporting oil from wells to refineries and then to export ports via pipelines would both provide cost advantages and optimise the production-consumption chain (Tverdohleb et al., 2012: 26).

At the end of the 19th century, railways accounted for approximately 20% of the transport of oil and its derivatives. However, industrial actors were searching for a system that was lower in cost, higher in capacity, and guaranteed continuity. Despite the technical advantages of pipelines, there were two main obstacles to the transition to this technology: concerns about monopolisation and initial resistance from the state. In particular, major refinery owners feared that transporting crude oil via pipelines to Batumi would lead to the establishment of new refinery centres in the region, thereby weakening their monopoly position. Additionally, the state authorities of the Russian Empire had not approved pipeline projects until mid-1886 due to strategic uncertainties. This resistance was broken in November 1886 when a consortium formed by Baku oil industrialists applied to the state. Led by prominent business leaders of the time, the consortium requested permission for the Trans-Caucasus Pipeline project, emphasising its economic and geopolitical benefits (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020). However, the debate over whether to transport crude oil or refined products disrupted the process. The final compromise, under pressure from refinery owners, was to transport kerosene, known as 'white oil.' This decision preserved the location of existing refinery facilities while strengthening Batumi as an export hub. One of the most important supporters of the Baku-Batumi pipeline was the French branch of the Rothschild family, Alfons and Edmond Rothschild (Mir-Babayev, 2018: 131). The Rothschilds played a critical role in financing the project and collaborated with the South Caucasus Railway Administration. Construction began in 1897 and lasted 10 years. The 835 km pipeline was the largest pipeline project of its time and represented a revolution in both technical and logistical terms (Movsumzade, 2002: 164).

The completion of the project significantly increased the competitiveness of Russian oil in global energy markets. The cost of transporting kerosene decreased by 50% compared to rail transport, dropping to 2 kopecks per pud. This reduction enabled Russian oil to gain a price advantage over competitors such as American Standard Oil. Additionally, the pipeline became profitable by 1912, and construction costs were amortised within five years, proving the project's economic success. Mendeleev's predictions were proven correct in terms of their influence on shaping Russia's oil policies. In this context, the South Caucasus railway project and the Baku-Batumi Pipeline project transformed Batumi from a small settlement into an important global port city, largely due to the flow of Baku oil (Balcı and Khanayev, 2025: 29). British researcher Michael Brooks also supports this view, emphasising the decisive role of Baku oil in Batumi's economic development (Mir-Babayev, 2015).

3. THE TRANSFORMATION OF BATUMI INTO A GLOBAL OIL TERMINAL: THE "GREAT GAME" AND THE SHAPING OF ENERGY GEOPOLITICS

In the 1860s, Batumi was a coastal town under Ottoman rule, but by the 20th century, it had become a globally important oil terminal on the Black Sea. This transformation had a multidimensional impact, from port infrastructure to international trade routes, competition between major powers, and the lives of the local community. The infrastructure transformation of the Port of Batumi gained momentum in the last quarter of the 19th century (Bay, 2016: 75-76). Following the Ottoman-Russian War of 1878, the Berlin Treaty granted Batumi the status of a 'Porto-Franco' (free port) under Russian rule. The free port regime (1878-1886) increased the interest of foreign traders and investors, particularly from Britain, in Batumi (Ekinci, 2007: 70). Indeed, during this period, global capital actors such as the Nobel Brothers and the Paris-based Rothschild family became actively involved in the region. The physical capacity of the Batumi port was increased by constructing storage facilities and refineries supported by foreign investments; for example, the BNITO company, owned by the Rothschild family, established a large oil refinery and barrel production facility in Batumi in the 1880s (Nusretoğlu, 2021: 1025). Thanks to these infrastructural developments, by the early 1900s, the port of Batumi had become a terminal capable of refuelling large tankers and accommodating ships with large tonnages. Indeed, the commissioning of the 835 km-long oil pipeline between Baku and Batumi in 1907 elevated Batumi to the position of the Russian Empire's primary oil export port on the Black Sea.

Batumi's role in international trade routes became globally significant with its transformation into an oil terminal. By the late 19th century, Russia had reached a level of oil production that rivalled the United States, and Baku oil began flowing to world markets via Batumi. In 1892, the tanker Murex, launched from Batumi at the initiative of Marcus Samuel, founder of Shell, transported oil to the Far East via the Suez Canal, marking the first time that Caspian oil was directly delivered to overseas markets (White, 2024: 112). This move established Batumi as a key hub in the energy routes connecting Asia and Europe while challenging Standard Oil's monopoly over American oil. By the end of the 19th century, oil-laden ships were sailing from the Port of Batumi to all corners of the world: in 1902, 285 fully loaded oil tankers (carrying approximately 57.6 million pounds of oil) departed from Batumi, and by 1908, the port's annual cargo volume had reached 42.9 million pounds, making Batumi the third-largest port in the Russian Empire after St. Petersburg and Odessa (Avdaliani, 2015: 354). This intense trade led to Batumi oil becoming a price-determining factor in London markets; the growing role of Russian oil in supplying energy to British industry made Batumi a critical part of British imperial strategy. On the other hand, the Russian administration's decision in 1886 to revoke Batumi's free port status and re-designate it as a customs-controlled military port reflected the tension between commercial freedom and geopolitical security (Ekinci, 2007: 71). This decision was an indication of the Russian Empire's efforts to consolidate its sovereignty over Batumi and balance foreign influence. As a result, by the 1900s, the Baku-Batumi line had emerged as a strategic artery affecting not only the Caucasus but also the global energy markets.

The military-strategic competition among the Ottoman, Russian and British forces left its mark on every stage of Batumi's transformation into an oil terminal. In the late 19th century, Batumi held special significance on the Caucasus front of the imperial rivalry known as the "Great Game". This competition aimed not only at territorial gains but also at expanding the sphere of geo-economic influence. Britain closely monitored the entry of Russian oil into world markets, striving to maintain control over this energy flow, which it deemed critical for its industry and navy. This situation has made Batumi the key point of the "Rimland" (Periphery), which is the gateway to the Mediterranean Sea in the Caspian-Black Sea energy corridor of Eurasia. Indeed, during the process of Batumi's transfer to Russia in 1878, Britain exerted diplomatic pressure

for free port status, taking care not to leave the city entirely under Russian control. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire never lost its desire to regain this strategically important piece of land. The First World War brought the struggle for influence over Batumi to a military level: the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in early 1918, stipulated that the new Bolshevik regime would cede southern Caucasia, including Batumi, to the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the Ottoman army re-entered Batumi in March 1918 and established control over the region for a short period. However, by the end of the same year, the balance of power shifted with the Ottoman Empire's defeat; in November 1918, British forces occupied Batumi and took control (Memmedli and Akgüller, 2020: 2730). The British aim was to secure the route to Baku, the centre of the Caucasian oil fields, and to prevent Bolshevik Russia or any other rival from using this vital port. After approximately two years under British occupation, Batumi and its surroundings were ceded to Georgia in July 1920. However, this situation did not last long; in 1921, an agreement was reached between the Ankara Government and the Soviet Union (the Treaty of Kars), whereby Batumi was to be annexed to Soviet Georgia in exchange for granting autonomy to the local population. This negotiation highlighted the importance of Batumi's ethnic and religious composition in the eyes of the great powers: Türkiye agreed to cede the city to Soviet rule on the condition that the rights of the Muslim population in Batumi would be protected. Thus, from 1921 onwards, Batumi became part of the Soviet Union and withdrew from the grand stage for a while (Arslan, 2010: 118). Nevertheless, with the German armies turning their attention to the Caucasian oil fields during World War II, Batumi's strategic value was once again felt, and the Soviet administration attached special importance to the defence of the region.

In conclusion, Batumi's story, which spans from a small border port to a global oil terminal in the 19th and 20th centuries, offers a striking example of how regional dynamics and global power balances are intertwined. Modernisation of the port infrastructure connected Baku's oil reserves to the world, while the restructuring of international trade routes transformed Batumi into a critical node in the Asia-Europe energy corridor. Throughout this process, Ottoman, Russian, and British rivalry repeatedly altered the city's status, ultimately establishing Batumi as a key piece on the geopolitical chessboard. All these developments had profound effects on the local population; Batumi's ethnic and cultural composition diversified, and its economic life was reorganised around oil. By the mid-20th century, Batumi had established itself as a unique oil centre, shaped not only by the Soviets but also by history, both in regional memory and in global energy history.

4. HISTORICAL CONTINUITY IN MODERN ENERGY CORRIDORS: BTC, TANAP AND THE REDISCOVERY OF THE BLACK SEA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The experience gained from the historic Baku-Batumi pipeline has left an important legacy for today's energy projects. After the collapse of the USSR, the hydrocarbon riches of the Caspian region once again became the focus of international competition, and Azerbaijan sought alternative routes to reliably deliver its oil and natural gas to world markets after gaining independence. As a result of these efforts, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline was put into operation in 2006. This pipeline, which transports Caspian oil through Georgia to the port of Ceyhan on Türkiye 's Mediterranean coast, has affected regional balances in much the same way as the Baku-Batumi project a century earlier (Güler, 2024: 461). The BTC project was constructed with the support of the United States and Europe on a route bypassing Russia and Iran, and now transports 80% of Azerbaijan's oil to international markets (Novikau and Muhasilovic, 2023: 3). Similarly, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) natural gas pipeline began

operating in 2007, transporting Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas to Türkiye. The BTE pipeline is also known as the South Caucasus Pipeline and is the first major natural gas infrastructure along the route. This gas bridge established between Azerbaijan and Türkiye laid the foundation for a broader energy corridor in the years to come (Rzayev et al., 2022: 1597). Indeed, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), which became operational in 2018, was designed as a continuation of the BTE and crosses Türkiye from end to end, reaching the European border. TANAP connects to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) via Greece and began transporting Azerbaijani gas to Europe in 2020. This Southern Gas Corridor was designed and implemented as a 3,500 km integrated system stretching from the Caspian Sea to Europe (Rehimov, 2025). These pipelines, constructed in the modern era, represent geostrategic steps taken to ensure that energy supply does not remain dependent on a single country or route. In particular, BTC, BTE, and TANAP serve the interests of both Azerbaijan, as an energy exporter, and European countries, as energy importers, by providing source and route diversification. The success of these projects has, on the one hand, revitalised regional economies and contributed to the economic development of countries such as Türkiye and Georgia through transit fees and investments, while on the other hand, it has disrupted Russia's traditional energy monopoly in the region and altered the geopolitical balance.

The structural similarities between historical and modern pipelines are striking. In both periods, energy transportation projects have been the scene of competition between major powers and have been shaped by concerns about energy security. While the Baku-Batumi line in the 19th century led to a struggle for influence between Britain and Tsarist Russia, the BTC and TANAP projects in the 21st century reflect a similar geopolitical tension between Russia and the West (the EU and the US). Just as Britain viewed access to Caspian oil via Batumi as strategic for the continuity of its industry (Yergin, 1991: 58), today the European Union has placed access to energy from the Caspian basin at the centre of its energy supply security strategies. The EU has made diversifying its energy suppliers and routes a long-term goal, having learned from the Russia-Ukraine gas crises of 2006 and 2009. Although the proposed NABUCCO project was not realised, the implementation of the TANAP-TAP route, albeit on a smaller scale, demonstrated the EU's determination (Siddi, 2019: 8-9). The European Union's energy security strategies are full of concrete steps aimed at reducing dependence on Russia: The construction of LNG terminals, investments in renewable energy, and particularly the development of the Southern Gas Corridor are at the forefront of these efforts. The strategic energy partnership agreement signed between the EU and Azerbaijan on 18 July 2022 underscores this policy by setting a target to double the export of Azerbaijani gas to Europe by 2027 (European Commission, 2022). As a result, as of 2022, the EU has made significant progress in ending its historical dependence on Russian gas and has positioned Azerbaijan as a 'reliable partner gas supplier' (Rehimov, 2025).

Türkiye has played important roles in these developments as a key energy transit country in both historical and contemporary contexts. During the Ottoman Empire, the Baku-Batumi oil route passed just north of Ottoman territory, and the empire attempted to become involved in energy geopolitics by briefly regaining Batumi in 1918, but was unable to sustain this. Türkiye in recent times, however, has taken steps toward becoming an energy corridor and potential energy hub by effectively leveraging its geo-economic position (Yıldırım et al., 2023: 37). The realization of the BTC and TANAP projects has positioned Türkiye as a gateway for Caspian energy resources to global markets while also enhancing Ankara's regional influence. Thanks to these projects, Türkiye is not only generating economic gains from transit fees and investments but also rising to the position of an indispensable partner in Europe's energy security. On the other hand, this role also gives Türkiye a strategic advantage: As a transit country, Türkiye holds a decisive position in ensuring the uninterrupted flow of east-west

energy trade and has the potential to use the energy card in its relations with the EU from time to time (Siddi, 2019: 8). However, Türkiye ‘s energy transit role creates mutual dependence, as Türkiye also relies on these international projects to meet its own energy needs and maintain regional stability. Therefore, both in the historical Baku-Batumi line and in modern projects such as BTC/TANAP, Türkiye has been a stabilizing actor for the sustainability of energy flows.

The Russia-Ukraine War after 2022 has led to fundamental changes in the European energy equation, causing the Black Sea to be rediscovered as a growing energy corridor. With the war, Russia restricted its natural gas supply to Europe as a political weapon, while EU countries quickly turned to alternative suppliers. Despite geopolitical risks, the Black Sea basin has gained importance as an alternative energy transit route. For example, projects such as transporting Kazakh oil via the Caspian-Black Sea route bypassing Russia or delivering Turkmen gas to Azerbaijan via the Caspian Sea and then to Europe via TANAP have begun to be discussed again (Kussainova, 2025). Additionally, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the status and security of Russian-Turkish pipelines such as TurkStream, which pass under the Black Sea, have come to the fore, highlighting the need for regional cooperation to protect energy infrastructure. The crisis triggered by the war has once again demonstrated how closely energy supply security is linked to national security, while also necessitating a reevaluation of traditional energy policies. While European countries weathered the 2022-2023 winter largely by increasing LNG imports and reducing consumption, they adopted the goal of establishing a more stable and diversified supply structure in the long term. The Middle Corridor concept, which connects Central Asia and Middle East sources to Europe via the Black Sea, has begun to be seen as strategic not only for trade but also for energy. Thus, after the war, the Black Sea-Caucasus route has once again become an energy artery focused on by major powers and regional countries, much like it was in the 19th century.

All these historical and contemporary experiences offer important lessons on energy supply security, resource and route diversity. First, multilateral diplomacy and cooperation are essential for the security and continuity of energy transit. Disputes over the status of Batumi in the 19th century showed that energy transmission lines are vulnerable to instability. Similarly today, international law and guarantee mechanisms are needed to maintain stability in regions through which pipelines pass. Second, the development of alternative routes serves as a strategic insurance mechanism: Historically, pipeline projects not supported by rail or sea routes have remained vulnerable, much like the Tsarist regime’s decision in 1886 to revoke Batumi’s free port status, which dealt a blow to trade. Therefore, even today, it is necessary to have different routes (e.g., Eastern Mediterranean, Northern Iraq, or Eastern European LNG terminals) as backups to reduce dependence on a single route or country (Bilgin, 2009: 4487). Third, sustainable energy policies are the most robust solution in the long term. Energy routes based on fossil fuels fuel competition among major powers and are no longer compatible with climate change mitigation goals. The EU’s plan to gradually reduce fossil gas demand in line with its 2050 carbon neutrality target may limit the lifespan of projects like TANAP, reminding us of the importance of investing in renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. States that once competed for oil abundance are now competing for leadership in clean energy technologies. Therefore, the most critical lesson that can be drawn from a historical perspective is that energy security can be achieved not only by seeking different suppliers but also through strategies for phasing out fossil fuels.

Finally, opportunities for regional cooperation along the Black Sea-Caucasus axis are of great importance in terms of overcoming historical tensions and maximizing common interests. In this context, renewable energy integration via the Black Sea is expanding the scope of cooperation: Azerbaijan and Georgia’s project to build an electricity transmission line from the Black Sea to Romania and Hungary could bring the countries in the region together around a

common goal of a sustainable future (Balcı and Khanayev, 2025: 209). All these opportunities for cooperation confirm that energy supply security is not a national issue but a regional one. For example, platforms such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization can develop an energy corridor partnership among member countries by focusing on the energy sector. However, the BECO has become a controversial international organization in terms of its effectiveness, particularly after the Russia-Ukraine War, due to changes in relations among its members and their impact on regional balances. The war has seriously called into question the BECO's capacity to balance tensions between Russia and Ukraine and promote cooperation. In this context, the future role of the BSEC is of critical importance for deepening regional cooperation, but reshaping this role requires stronger dialogue and cooperation among the organization's members.

In the past, the success of the Baku-Batumi line depended on the ability of different nations to cooperate to a certain extent. Similarly, the cooperation developing today in the energy sector between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkiye could spread to other countries in the region. However, the sustainability of this cooperation depends not only on Armenia's decision to cooperate with Turkiye, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, which is important in terms of ensuring energy security as well as regional peace and stability, but also on certain strategic and political factors. Armenia's participation in this cooperation is a positive development in terms of energy security, but the sustainability of this cooperation will be shaped by factors such as border issues with Azerbaijan and Turkiye, Armenia's foreign policy preferences, and regional power balances. In particular, Armenia's continued participation in this cooperation is directly related not only to the normalization of inter-state relations but also to the joint management of energy projects and the capacity of these projects to ensure economic and political stability.

However, the historical and current strategic importance of the Zangezur Corridor is a key element for the advancement of regional cooperation. Zangezur has historically served as a transit route, connecting Azerbaijan and Turkiye by land. The reopening of this corridor offers significant opportunities, particularly in terms of energy transportation. While Azerbaijan aims to diversify its energy supply through this corridor, it also plans to strengthen regional energy security by ensuring the strategic security of this route. Azerbaijan's goal of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and developing an energy policy based on renewable energy sources is one of the fundamental objectives of the country's future energy strategies. In line with these goals, Azerbaijan's energy policies have evolved into a structure that encourages the transition from fossil fuel-based energy production to renewable energy sources. This change will increase the Zengezur Corridor's contribution to energy security and create a sustainable infrastructure for regional cooperation.

All these opportunities for cooperation confirm that energy supply security is not a national issue, but a regional one. In summary, the energy journey stretching from the Baku-Batumi line to BTC, BTE, and TANAP is part of a larger picture that reflects historical continuity. This picture reveals the nature of the centuries-long struggle over energy resources and routes, while offering promising lessons that energy geopolitics can be shaped around cooperation rather than conflict if the principles of dialogue, diversity, and sustainability are embraced. However, to ensure the continuity of these collaborations and regional stability, it is crucial to secure a broader regional agreement that includes Armenia and to manage energy projects within the framework of international cooperation.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has revealed the historical continuity and structural similarities between the Baku-Batumi Pipeline and modern energy corridors such as BTC, BTE and TANAP through

comparative analysis. In the 19th century, the Baku-Batumi pipeline transformed Batumi into an energy terminal by transporting Caspian oil to the Black Sea, playing a central role in the energy-based competition between England, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. The same strategic logic remains valid today; projects such as BTC and TANAP enable Azerbaijan's energy resources to be safely transported to Western markets via Türkiye. The emergence of modern pipelines has not only enhanced energy supply security but also strengthened the regional positions of Türkiye and Georgia as transit countries. The European Union has turned to alternative suppliers such as Azerbaijan in order to reduce its energy dependence; as a result of this shift, the development of the Southern Gas Corridor has become a priority policy. The Russia-Ukraine War after 2022 has accelerated this strategic shift, leading to the Black Sea once again assuming a critical position in energy geopolitics. The war has clearly demonstrated not only the importance of supply security but also the need for regional cooperation to protect energy infrastructure.

One of the most important lessons that can be drawn from these historical and current developments is that route and source diversity are indispensable for energy security. At the same time, regional stability and multilateral diplomatic cooperation are necessary for the sustainability of energy transit. The EU's plans to phase out fossil fuels in line with its carbon neutrality targets show that the transition to clean energy is not only necessary for the climate but also strategically imperative. At the regional level, it is possible to expand the existing energy cooperation among Azerbaijan, Türkiye and Georgia to include Armenia and other Black Sea countries. Energy partnerships developed through platforms such as the Black Sea Energy Council (BSEC) can both facilitate the establishment of secure pipeline networks and contribute to political normalisation. Additionally, new-generation projects such as electricity transmission lines passing under the Black Sea can serve the region's sustainable energy future. In conclusion, the energy corridors stretching from Baku-Batumi to the present day are not only technical infrastructures but also strategic arteries where regional stability and international cooperation are built. This big picture offers a powerful perspective that energy geopolitics can be shaped on the basis of cooperation rather than conflict.

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