



# Armenia's European hopes amid Georgia's crisis: The EU's opportunity in the South Caucasus

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## Executive Summary

The South Caucasus is, as usual, in geopolitical flux. Against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, regional strategic shifts and a fragmenting world order, the region's countries are undergoing significant foreign policy realignments. For Armenia and Georgia, the region's two hybrid regimes with democratic and western aspirations, this has meant major changes in their approaches to the EU, albeit in opposite directions. While Armenia is for the first time talking about future EU membership, Georgia's relations with the EU have been clouded by the government's pro-Russia and authoritarian turn.

Each is affecting the other, as Russia's tentacles stretch from volatile Georgia to isolated Armenia. The EU should therefore now develop a unified approach to both countries with the same regional goals: promoting democracy, prosperity and stability, countering Russian influence and strengthening Europe's strategic, geopolitical and transit opportunities. In Georgia, the EU should seek to prevent the worst-case scenarios by increasing pressure on government officials while supporting agents of change and the pro-European population. One immediate goal should be to learn lessons for and create the most favourable regional circumstances for Armenia.

In Armenia, the EU should invest more in the country's peace process with Azerbaijan, which is essential for normalisation and open borders with Türkiye, and thus Armenia's long-term trade, cooperation and integration with the EU. To dare to break free from Russia, Armenia will need a serious long-term EU alternative that includes both free trade and security components and promotes diversification and resilience.

Crucially, in Armenia, the EU should not repeat the mistakes it made with Georgia. This means not allowing flawed geopolitical analysis to trump values and merits, communicating clearly to both government and population about reform expectations and failures, matching progress with carrots and sticks on a conditional basis, and giving civil society and the population the tools to hold their leaders accountable.

## Introduction: towards or away from the EU?

Georgia's and Armenia's relations with the European Union (EU) and Russia have undergone major changes throughout the 2020s. In the case of Armenia, its bilateral partnership with Russia and membership of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) – coupled with its isolation from neighbouring Türkiye and Azerbaijan due to the war over Nagorno-Karabakh – were long regarded as constants that anchored Armenia firmly within Russia's sphere of influence. This limited closer contacts with the EU, as demonstrated when Armenia, following Russian pressure, was forced to end a previously negotiated Association Agreement with the EU in 2013. However, when Russia neglected to uphold its security commitments to Armenia in the Second Karabakh War in 2020, and since Azerbaijan's takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, Armenia has attempted to distance itself from Russia and strengthen its ties with western powers, especially the EU.

Armenia's current relationship with the EU is guided by the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), in force since 2021, which provides for broad cooperation on reform and alignment with EU standards, among other things. The EU accounts for a relatively small share of Armenia's trade compared with Russia, but ties have increased in the past two years, including new initiatives such as the EU civilian mission (EUMA) and a €270 million Resilience and Growth Plan. Additional milestones include the launch of a visa liberalisation dialogue, provision of EU security assistance for Armenia's armed forces and work on a more ambitious Partnership Agenda to be finalised in 2025, supported by frequent high-level political dialogue. Armenia is trying to strengthen its ties with the EU but these efforts are hampered by its heavy dependence on Russia, limited western resources and focus, and ongoing regional volatility. Domestic political issues and a stalled reform process further complicate any long-term shift towards the West.

In contrast to Armenia's shift westward, Georgia has recently moved in the other direction. For many years, its active pursuit of membership of the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was perceived as an expression of its aim to avoid Russian hegemony. Russia's long-term exploitation of the unresolved conflicts in Georgia and the 2008 Georgia-Russia War guaranteed that Georgia would always move to counter Russian influence. However, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 changed the equation. The war convinced Georgian Dream (GD), the ruling party, and oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, its founding father and the country's ruler behind the scenes, that the West could not offer Georgia real protection against Russia. The government therefore initiated a rapprochement with Russia while, at the same time, the erosion of democracy under GD's leadership has alienated the country from the EU.

This report analyses the links between Armenia's and Georgia's political orientation vis-à-vis the EU and makes recommendations on how the EU should respond to each country's ambitions, developments, challenges and opportunities. While the countries are very different in many respects, including in their ties with the EU thus far, they share several crucial similarities, notably their external regional circumstances, malign Russian influence and their EU membership ambitions. This leaves the two neighbours interconnected, which should be reflected in EU policy. Importantly, the EU should draw lessons from its previous mistakes in Georgia in its relations with Armenia.



## Georgia's deteriorating relations with the EU

Relations between Georgia and the EU deteriorated rapidly after the parliamentary elections on 26 October 2024. International observers widely criticised the elections for failing to meet democratic standards and the EU reacted to what it considered a significant democratic setback under the ruling Georgian Dream party.

Shortly after, on 28 November 2024, the GD government unilaterally decided to suspend EU accession negotiations for four years. This decision led to large-scale mass protests, and the heavy-handed methods used by the Georgian police to suppress these further raised concerns among EU member states about the country's democratic progress and the country's rejection of the path to Europe just one year after Georgia had been granted EU candidate status.

By framing the decision to halt the accession talks as a defence against external interference, the GD leadership sent a clear and unambiguous message: the government was no longer officially pursuing EU integration. Although meaningful reforms to implement EU integration ceased several years ago, due to GD's fear of reforms threatening their power, this development marked the culmination of what can be described as a [constitutional coup](#), as is evident in two key respects. First, it directly contradicted [Article 78](#) of the Constitution of Georgia, which enshrines that constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the EU and NATO. Second, the first session of parliament was convened without the approval of the president, despite the fact that the Constitution grants no authority to parliament to act as a substitute in such circumstances. The EU has taken a range of [punitive measures](#) in response to Georgia's democratic backsliding, including suspending financial aid, imposing targeted visa restrictions and issuing public condemnations. However, there has been increasing dissatisfaction within Georgian society and among Europeans more broadly that EU actions have been fragmented and insufficiently attuned to the country's domestic realities.

## Lessons learned from the granting of EU candidate status to Georgia

The decision to grant Georgia EU candidate status in December 2023 was driven by a [combination](#) of geopolitical strategy, strong societal support for European integration and the EU's desire to maintain leverage on democratic reforms, while managing the risks of Russian influence and regional instability. The decision was further influenced by the broader context of enlargement following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Granting candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova created [momentum](#) and a perception that, as a fellow Eastern Partnership country, Georgia could not be left behind without risking perceptions of unfairness or inconsistency in EU policy. However, for all the good intentions, given the track record of Georgia's democratic reform both before and after December 2023, there are several arguments that granting Georgia EU candidate status was premature.

### **1. Democratic backsliding and repressive legislation**

Since being granted candidate status, Georgia has enacted laws that are fundamentally incompatible with EU values, notably measures that stifle media freedom, restrict civil society and discriminate against vulnerable groups such as the LGBT+ community. The GD party has passed several so-called foreign agents laws targeting NGOs and media outlets that receive foreign funding. The first was modelled after Russian legislation but was later scrapped for a law based on the US Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which was originally enacted in 1938. These actions led to widespread protests, violent crackdowns and international condemnation, and [the European Parliament](#) has explicitly stated that Georgia's democratic backsliding has effectively put its EU integration on hold. Since the GD government had already been failing for some time on democratic standards, the EU should have reckoned with the risk that granting candidate status could further undermine the EU's credibility in upholding its own accession criteria.

### **2. Failure to meet EU preconditions and reform benchmarks**

In its [2023 Communication](#) on EU Enlargement Policy, the European Commission recommended granting EU candidacy to Georgia, providing it implemented a number of reforms. The report addressed the track record of implementation of 12 priorities specified in the EC's Opinion of June 2022 focusing on issues such as political polarisation, judicial independence, de-oligarchisation and media freedom. Georgia's progress in these areas was [widely criticised as insufficient](#). In fact, the government's official positions have often contradicted EU policy, especially regarding Russia, and political narratives have at times aligned with Kremlin interests in parallel with a growing economic dependence on Russia. Granting candidate status before the conditions were fully met rewarded incomplete reforms and sent the wrong signal to other candidate countries about the rigour of the accession process.

### **3. Escalation of anti-EU and anti-western rhetoric**

Even after receiving candidate status, the GD government escalated its anti-EU and anti-western rhetoric, blaming the EU for various injustices and promoting conspiracy theories about foreign interference. The GD adopted a conspiracy theory of the "Global War Party", according to which, without any evidence, western powers were accused of provoking Russia's war in Ukraine and trying, together with the Georgian opposition, to force Georgia to open a second front against Russia. This approach has contributed to a [climate of distrust](#) and has further strained relations between Tbilisi and Brussels, undermining the spirit of partnership that EU candidacy is supposed to foster. Granting status under these conditions risked legitimising such rhetoric and weakening the EU's normative influence.

### **4. Manipulation of public opinion in Georgia**

The decision to grant Georgia EU candidate status was widely [interpreted](#) as recognition of the strong pro-European aspirations of the Georgian people and civil society, where 80 per cent of the population has consistently for a decade supported EU integration, rather than a straightforward endorsement of the government's actions. This sent the wrong signals in several ways. Most important was the obvious delusion that candidate status could be given to the people instead of the country itself and its government. This, in turn, opened the door for the GD to manipulate propaganda so that it could continue with its obvious anti-EU policy while conveying a message internally that it was possible to be both pro-EU and pro-GD.

In summary, Georgia's democratic regression and failure to meet accession criteria, the government's antagonistic stance towards the EU and the internal manipulation of public opinion all suggest that granting candidate status to Georgia was premature and counterproductive. However, the blame cannot be placed entirely on the EU, but must of course be shared with the Georgian government. It shows that the best of intentions – that candidacy would inspire improved EU integration on the Georgian side – quickly turned into their opposite.

## **How will Georgia's U-turn affect Armenia's EU aspirations?**

Georgia's stark pivot away from a democratic and pro-European path will have consequences for Armenia and its EU aspirations, most of them negative. In many ways, Armenia is dependent on Georgia as its sole gateway to Europe and the West. Its borders to the east with Azerbaijan and to the west with Türkiye remain closed and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Its southern border with Iran is the only other gateway to the world. Goods transit to and from the West can therefore only take place through Georgia.

Trade diversification is one of the key ways for Armenia to reduce its dependence on Russia and get closer to the EU. This leaves Armenia heavily dependent on Georgia, at least until a future border opening with Türkiye. For this reason, the more Georgia falls into Russia's orbit, the more Armenia becomes dependent on normalising relations with Türkiye as an alternative westward path. Georgia's current pro-Russia and anti-EU trajectory is likely to continue, which means that Armenia's European future will be strongly tied to its relations with Türkiye.

From a wider geopolitical perspective, Georgia's authoritarian turn has larger regional impacts on Armenia. On the one hand, a potentially positive consequence is that the European attention, money and effort that would have been spent on promoting Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations might instead be spent in Armenia. Armenia increasingly looks like the sole democratic and European hope in the South Caucasus. If the EU wants to reach its regional goals of promoting democracy and stability, counteracting Moscow's influence and ensuring eastward transit routes bypassing Russia's grasp, it cannot ignore Armenia.

However, if Georgia becomes more autocratic, this might make the South Caucasus region as a whole less relevant for the EU. Given the major challenges facing the EU internally and externally, the South Caucasus might fall even further down the list of priorities if the prospects for positive developments appear small. Furthermore, if Moscow, through its presence in Georgia, were able to insert itself into east-west transit routes intended to bypass Russia, this would reduce the long-term strategic value of the region for Europe – at least until transit can bypass Georgia by going through Armenia instead.

Finally, the further Georgia falls under Russian influence, the greater the risks for – and pressure on – Armenia. For instance, this dynamic could lead to strengthened Russian control over north-south transit routes and infrastructure, such as a railway from Russia to Armenia through Georgia, reinforcing Russia's grip not only on Georgia but also on Armenia and the entire region.

Moreover, one of Russia's key geopolitical goals in Georgia, which appears to be increasingly attainable, is to coerce Tbilisi into joining the 3+3 regional cooperation format, which comprises the three South Caucasus countries Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the three neighbouring powers, Iran, Russia and Türkiye. Tbilisi has not formally joined due to its position of non-engagement with formats that involve Russia. Originally conceived by Russia and Türkiye in 2020 as a regional dialogue mechanism for addressing security, economic and connectivity issues without direct western involvement, the initiative has thus far consisted of annual meetings at the level of foreign ministers.

Russia has had some success in gaining traction with the format and members have shown a willingness to engage with and sign up to the anti-western agenda. At the same time, there have been no breakthroughs in terms of binding agreements or major projects, and Georgia's refusal and Armenia's wariness limit the potential. Georgia joining could help Moscow in its [goal](#) to transform it into a fully-fledged regional organisation, which would put pressure on Armenia to engage further. Russia could then use it to pull Armenia away from EU-focused formats, potentially hindering Armenian pro-EU moves and revitalising Russia's role as regional broker, and limiting the EU's influence and mediation role.

## **Will Armenia's new EU law take it closer to Europe?**

On 26 March 2025, Armenia's parliament passed a so-called EU law, starting the process of EU accession. This legislation marks the first time Armenia has formally expressed its ambition to join the EU and should be seen in the broader context of closer EU-Armenia ties, exemplified by the almost finalised negotiations on a New Partnership Agenda which aims to complement and enhance implementation of the existing CEPA. This is a significant step and signal on its own, marking Armenia's ongoing efforts to move closer to the EU.

At the same time, many serious question marks surround Armenia's European trajectory, most notably linked to the current government's intentions and strategies. Crucially, one probable reason why the EU law was passed by the ruling party in parliament was to co-opt the pro-European sentiment of the Eurovote civic initiative behind the legislation, thereby preventing the nationwide referendum pursued by that movement. Despite its significance, aware of who had initiated it, the government was relatively quiet about the passing of the law.

For Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, consolidating public opinion, including the popular pro-EU elements, is crucial ahead of national elections in 2026. For various reasons, the EU and dreams of future Armenian membership provide a strong beacon of hope for Armenians, which the Pashinyan government must take into account. The EU represents a positive to the negative of Russia and the Soviet Union, signifying a better quality of life, the absence of corruption and wider possibilities.

Whether this really reflects serious long-term political will to bring the country closer to the EU is another question. From a geopolitical perspective, the government might be said to have taken steps to distance itself from Russia and pivot toward the West. From a values-based perspective, however, the picture is different, and in many ways the government's actions do not match its words. Reforms have stalled in many areas, while justice for kleptocrats and oligarchs, which is high on the population's wish list, has yet to materialise, heavy-handed tactics are used against political opponents, and widespread corruption and power centralisation continue.

Much of the CEPA is still to be implemented and little is known about the content of the New Partnership Agenda – a document that is not publicly available, much like the draft peace treaty agreed with Azerbaijan.

A second problem concerns the genuine views and wishes of the population. In general, Armenians have moderately positive views of the EU, but these views fluctuate significantly and perceptions of the EU are less favourable compared to other external actors, such as India, Iran and the US. Furthermore, Armenians have limited knowledge of the EU and a poor understanding of the main benefits that EU integration and membership would bring to Armenia. Only one-third consider Armenian membership of the EU to be likely.

Importantly, Armenian views on Russia are also volatile and ambiguous. On the one hand, perceptions of Russia have declined considerably in recent years due to feelings of betrayal and abandonment. On the other hand, polls suggest that most Armenians are still positive about the country maintaining its strong ties with Russia.

These popular views present serious obstacles to the Pashinyan government's attempts to re-orient Armenia away from Russia and towards Europe. In the recent local elections in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city, the ruling party lost to a coalition led by a pro-Russian, self-proclaimed communist who favours a union state with Russia. While Gyumri has its own unique circumstances, as the host of Russia's 102nd military base, the results provide hints about popular opinion ahead of the 2026 national elections. Crucially, the small and fragmented pro-EU opposition parties failed to pass the threshold in the Gyumri local elections.

## Can Armenia continue to balance between Russia and the EU?

Perhaps the biggest question mark surrounding the prospects for Armenia's European path is the country's still major dependence on Russia. Across a wide and diverse range of areas, Russia has a major presence and influence in Armenia. These include the economy and trade, energy, infrastructure, the security services and intelligence, and defence. Importantly, Armenia's economic reliance on Russia has increased since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Trade has experienced significant growth due to Armenia's role in re-exporting goods to Russia, increasing by almost 500 per cent from \$2.5 billion in 2021 to \$12.4 billion in 2024. Russia is

Armenia's largest trade partner, representing 35–40 per cent of Armenia's total foreign trade turnover in recent years. At the same time, trade with the EU, previously Armenia's largest trading partner, has declined to fourth place, accounting for only 7 per cent of total trade in 2024. Armenia's energy dependence on Russia is significant and multifaceted. Gas makes up more than half of Armenia's energy mix and is imported almost exclusively from Russia via a pipeline through Georgia. Gazprom Armenia – a subsidiary of Russia's state-owned Gazprom – fully owns Armenia's gas distribution network and is the monopoly operator. Armenia's only nuclear power plant – the Soviet-era Metsamor NPP, which supplies about one-third of domestic electricity – relies heavily on Russian nuclear fuel and technical support. Russian companies also hold stakes in Armenia's electricity networks and have historically invested in power plants and grid management.



In the [military sphere](#), on the contrary, Yerevan has taken steps to diversify and cut the previous dependence on Russia. Armenia's defeat in the 2020 Second Karabakh War, followed by Azerbaijani offensives on Armenian territory and Nagorno-Karabakh in 2022 and 2023, marked a turning point in the country's defence strategy. These conflicts exposed critical weaknesses in the Armenian army, which remained largely reliant on outdated Soviet and Russian weaponry. Since the end of 2022, however, India and France have emerged as Armenia's primary suppliers, providing nearly the entire range of weapons and equipment necessary for the country's defence. Russia's share in Armenian's arms procurement has dropped dramatically from over 96 per cent before 2022 to just 10 per cent.

Other diversification efforts include, in the economic sphere, that the EU is providing some financial support to bolster small and medium-sized enterprises, renewable energy, digital connectivity and resilience. Certain Armenian goods enjoy tariff-free access to the EU market through CEPA implementation, and EU-funded programmes are modernising laboratories and certifying specific products to enable exports of goods that meet EU standards. In the energy sector, Armenia has made efforts to import electricity from Iran and expand renewable energy to improve independence, and there are ongoing discussions with western partners on [nuclear energy](#) cooperation.

However, because of its dependence and the benefits that Armenia receives from its relations with Russia, diversifying from Russia would be costly for Armenia, not least in the economic sphere. More importantly, moving away from Russia carries significant risk due to the potential for a future Russian backlash. Russian officials have recently [warned](#) that Armenia's membership of the EU would cost it at least one-third of its GDP.

The systemic and structural ties that bind Armenia to Russia provide Moscow with powerful levers that it could exploit to a much greater extent if it chooses to punish Armenia further or reassert control. For instance, a large-scale campaign to disrupt Armenian exports or restrict imports of Russian energy could serve as a litmus test for whether Russia views Armenia's efforts to diversify away from Moscow and strengthen its independence as having gone too far. For this reason, the Pashinyan government continues its precarious balancing act between distancing itself, at least in its rhetoric, from Russia without provoking it too far. Pashinyan's visit to Moscow for the Victory Day parade on 9 May is one example, as is Armenian high-level official rhetoric [downplaying](#) the country's European ambitions. In recent months, the Armenian government has even tried to mend its political ties with Moscow, through visits and statements. This probably reflects a fear that, given ongoing political developments around Ukraine and the US, Russia might soon emerge victorious, meaning that it can refocus its attention and resources to the South Caucasus, and reassert the influence it lost during the war. Yerevan appears convinced that it is a question of when, not if, Moscow returns, and is preparing for this scenario accordingly.

At the same time, this delicate balancing act and the rhetorical EU pivot might actually strengthen Armenia's hand in its dealings with Moscow. In a period where Russian influence globally has been weakened – especially in the post-Soviet sphere – Armenia's importance as a regional partner has grown. Moscow needs to keep Yerevan in its orbit not just through bilateral ties, but also through multilateral tools such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the CSTO. This has created an opportunity for Armenia to use its EU ambitions as leverage, potentially to secure better terms or more room for manoeuvre as Moscow tries to prevent further losses in its regional backyard.

## Conclusions and Policy recommendations for the EU

The EU made many mistakes in Georgia. For years, it did not notice or take seriously the flashing red lights linked to the actions of the Georgian Dream government. Once the EU did start to acknowledge the government's anti-democratic and anti-EU behaviour, it downplayed these through mild, hopeful rhetoric and even milder actions. To encourage the government, it used mostly carrots, too generously given, and very few sticks.

With too little knowledge of Georgia's politics and societal dynamics, the EU failed to send clear messages to the population about what GD's authoritarian turn would mean for the country's EU aspirations, allowing GD to manipulate voters with populist, anti-EU narratives. It focused its civil society support on a mostly urban, elite, western-oriented and professional class of organisations. Finally, out of a naive fear of pushing Georgia too hard, and based not on values but on a flawed geopolitical analysis, the EU made several fatal decisions, most notably awarding Georgia candidate status.

The EU should avoid repeating these mistakes in Armenia. As in Georgia, concerns have grown over the years regarding stalled reform efforts, heavy-handed tactics against opponents, widespread corruption, lacking transitional justice, over-centralisation of power, pressure on the media and instrumentalised societal polarisation. As in Georgia, the government in Yerevan could be leveraging EU aspirations more as a political tool to consolidate popular support, while balancing relations between the West and Russia. The recent warming of ties with Moscow raises questions about Armenia's long-term orientation. The EU's current approach, as previously vis-à-vis Georgia, relies mainly on incentives without clear conditionality, and risks sending mixed signals to both government and society about expectations and requirements.

### EU policy recommendations for Georgia and Armenia

In the case of Georgia, the EU must act more forcefully towards the government while continuing to support the population – enforcing strict conditionality, keeping channels open with Georgian civil society and using its influence to encourage a return to democratic norms. The EU's strategy must make clear that Georgia's path to Europe depends on genuine, sustainable progress with democratic reforms and a real alignment with EU values.

The EU does not really risk much by being tougher on Georgia. The regime is not excessively strong or wealthy, and the Georgian elite does not want to become Russia's backyard. A stricter values-based policy could include measures often advocated by Georgian civil society.

- **Impose further visa restrictions.** In December 2024, the European Commission [proposed](#) – and the Council subsequently adopted – a suspension of parts of the EU-Georgia visa facilitation agreement. This means that Georgian diplomats, government officials and their families holding diplomatic or official passports are now required to obtain visas for short stays in the EU. The EU should consider broader changes to its visa policy, which could allow for the suspension of visa-free regimes for entire populations in response to serious human rights violations or breaches of international law.

**Impose tougher sanctions on individuals.** EU foreign ministers have discussed imposing sanctions on specific Georgian government officials responsible for the crackdown on protests and on opposition figures. Some EU member states, such as the Baltic states, and other countries such as the US and the UK have already moved in this direction, even as some EU member states, notably Hungary and Slovakia, have resisted broader EU-wide sanctions.

In Armenia, the EU should strengthen and enable the country's EU aspirations.

- **Provide Armenia with a serious long-term economic alternative to the EAEU**  
Armenia's long-term EU integration will be built on shifting flows of trade and investment from Russia to the EU, which requires a free trade agreement that is incompatible with Armenia's current membership of the customs union of the EAEU. For Armenia to take the dangerous and costly leap of faith of abandoning the EAEU, however, it needs a credible alternative.

Beyond the CEPA, this could take the form of an updated and adjusted Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. EU grants, investment guarantees, and technical backup will be essential to smooth Armenia's transition and mitigate risks. Integrating Armenia into the European Energy Community could boost energy security and reduce Russian leverage. Promoting EU investments in strategic sectors, such as high-tech, green energy and agriculture, would also reduce dependence on Russia, which accounts for a large share of Armenia's foreign direct investment.

Moreover, the EU and Armenia could jointly develop a roadmap on how Armenia could be granted EU candidate country status in the future.

- **Invest more in the peace process to enable Armenian reform and a westward pivot**  
Armenia's reform capacity is severely hampered by the looming threat of renewed conflict, which drains government resources, destabilises public opinion and limits internal stability. Moreover, any future trade and economic integration with the EU will rely on open borders with Türkiye – an outcome contingent on progress in the peace process with Azerbaijan, since Ankara is unlikely to proceed without it.

To support this, the EU must play a more active and credible role in the peace and normalisation processes between Armenia and its neighbours, ensuring legitimacy with all sides. The EU's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, could personally invest in this effort, building on her April 2025 [visit](#) to Baku which helped to restore EU credibility in Azerbaijan. The EU could also establish an EU-South Caucasus Peace Support Fund to finance cross-border economic and cultural exchanges and offer technical support for border demarcation and customs modernisation.

- **Ensure the government is publicly held accountable for its European ambitions**  
Reform progress can only be sustained with the active participation of civil society and the population. To enable monitoring and evaluation of the government's actions, the EU should clearly communicate both successes and failures, in public statements by EU officials, including the EU delegation in Yerevan.

Beyond current CEPA monitoring, the European Commission could introduce an annual Armenia Reform Progress Report – similar to enlargement reports – to assess alignment with EU standards and values. In recognition of the clarity of civil society reporting, the EU should promote dialogue between the government and civil society, and support the creation of accessible digital monitoring platforms. Proper, sustained funding for these initiatives and for annual public dialogues in Yerevan would help to ensure meaningful scrutiny and strengthen public trust in reform efforts.

## EU policy recommendations on its regional approach

Armenia's precarious geopolitical position means that its success as an independent, democratic and European country is tied to its surroundings. To enable Armenia's path away from Russian dependence and towards Europe, the EU must therefore also work through regional efforts.

- **Limit the southward spread of Russia's malign influence from Georgia**

As Georgia drifts closer to Moscow's orbit, Armenia faces heightened risks. Russian efforts to promote platforms such as the 3+3 regional framework and plans for transport corridors, such as railways through Georgia into Armenia, threaten to cement Russian control not only over Armenia's regional connectivity, but also over its broader political and economic trajectory. These developments would weaken Armenia's independence and diminish its ability to pursue closer ties with the EU and other partners.

The EU must therefore take active steps to hinder the spread of Russian influence in Georgia and to protect Armenia's sovereignty and reform agenda. To promote greater connectivity between Armenia and alternative regional partners, the EU should explore practical infrastructure and trade initiatives that bypass Russian-controlled routes, such as supporting the Middle Corridor through the Caspian or deepening trilateral ties with Armenia and Türkiye, should normalisation progress.

- **Engage with Türkiye regionally through cooperation and leverage**

Generally speaking, the EU and Türkiye are [aligned](#) regionally in many ways, including for strategic, energy-related and trade transit reasons, such as countering Russian influence and furthering the Middle Corridor. Moreover, in the current European security and defence policy context, where Türkiye wants to be included in joint EU efforts to strengthen military and defence industrial capacity, the EU might possess leverage over Ankara.

The EU should therefore use this cooperation and influence with Türkiye to push for further normalisation efforts with Armenia. Ankara might also be central to encouraging Baku to proceed with the peace process. The EU should promote people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges between Armenia and Türkiye. The level of general knowledge about Armenia in Türkiye is currently very low.

- **Include Armenia in regional transit cooperation plans and discussions**

For Armenia to reduce its dependence on Russia, integrate further with Europe and strengthen its economy in the long term, it needs to be part of regional transport plans. If Armenia continues to be isolated, it will face difficulties in its development. Furthermore, with Russia's grasp on Georgia strengthening, transit through Armenia might become increasingly important for east-west transport corridors that seek to bypass Russia.



Concretely, the EU could promote regional transit discussions between Armenia and other Middle Corridor countries by creating a South Caucasus-Central Asia transit dialogue platform at the ministerial level that includes Türkiye, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states. The EU's new [Black Sea Strategy](#), which includes Armenia, is a step in the right direction.

- **Support a wider set of societal actors**

In both Georgia and Armenia, the EU's efforts to strengthen civil society and democratic accountability have often focused on a narrow circle of well-connected, urban, professional NGOs. While these groups play an important role, they do not always fully represent the broader population.

To address this, the EU should broaden its support for independent, grassroots initiatives beyond capital cities – especially in rural areas and among youth. This could include targeted, flexible small-scale grant schemes that reduce bureaucratic barriers for new actors, technical and language assistance to help local groups navigate funding processes and promotion of collaboration between established NGOs and emerging local voices. The EU could also strengthen support for independent professional associations and sectoral organisations.

Engaging with a wider range of local and regional actors would strengthen social cohesion, counter polarisation and build resilience against external malign influences, all of which are key goals in both countries' fragile domestic political contexts.



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