



# No going back now? Armenia-EU relations after the 2026 Parliamentary elections

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## Executive summary

The 7 June 2026 parliamentary elections in Armenia concluded with a majority for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's ruling Civil Contract party. The election was heavily framed as a decisive test for the country's geopolitical shift towards the West and away from Russia, as a result of disillusionment with Russia.

At the same time, Armenia's enduring ties with Russia in the realms of the economy, energy and security represent a vulnerability that Russia can exploit. Armenia's membership of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) present challenges that make Armenia's European path different to previous integration cases. Alternatively, Russian economic coercion could backfire and help to accelerate Armenia's European turn.

While the EU is eager to use the momentum on Armenia's side to deepen cooperation, there is no appetite for another membership application from the South Caucasus. The EU would prefer to continue stepwise alignment through sectoral cooperation that avoids raising too many political questions. The status quo seems to suit both sides, allowing Armenia sufficient ambiguity to avoid explicitly picking a side, and the EU to avoid political issues over membership.

Closer cooperation with the EU has become an important source of political legitimacy for the government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. This creates opportunities for the EU but also exposes it to disappointment should the peace process with Azerbaijan stall or regional tensions escalate. However, popular support for European integration should not be conflated with widespread support for the government, which many pro-European Armenian citizens view critically. The close association between Armenia's European trajectory and the ruling Civil Contract party could prove a short-term political asset but a long-term vulnerability for the EU's engagement in the country.

## Introduction

The 7 June 2026 parliamentary elections in Armenia concluded with a majority for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's ruling Civil Contract party. The election was heavily framed as a decisive test of the country's geopolitical shift towards the West and away from Russia. According to the official result announced by the Central Election Commission (CEC), [three political forces](#) cleared the necessary threshold for seats in the National Assembly:

- The **Civil Contract Party** led by Pashinyan, the perceived pro-EU ruling party, secured 49.75 per cent of the vote, capturing an outright parliamentary majority of 64 of the 105 seats.
- The newly formed **Strong Armenia Party**, a vocally pro-Russian bloc led by the Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan, came second with 23.27 percent of the vote and 29 seats.
- The **Armenia Alliance** led by former President Robert Kocharyan, which is also considered to be pro-Russia, secured 9.92 percent of the vote and 12 seats.

The collective vote share for the opposition was larger than predicted by the opinion polls before the elections. A third opposition party, Prosperous Armenia led by the business tycoon Gagik Tsarukyan, had looked set to enter parliament but a later tally of electronic votes put the party just under the 4 per cent threshold (3.98%). This was not insignificant since any seats for Prosperous Armenia would have deprived Civil Contract of the majority required to independently appoint judges and law-enforcement officials. Even so, in contrast to the 2021 parliamentary election, Civil Contract did not achieve a “super-majority” of 70 seats, which is required to call a referendum without cross-party support. Azerbaijan's main demand in a final peace agreement with Armenia is that Yerevan must amend its constitution to remove all references to Nagorno-Karabakh, which now seems more difficult for Pashinyan.

Despite accusations of irregularities from the opposition parties, the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) [assessed](#) that the election was professionally managed and offered voters a genuine choice, even though it was severely challenged by unprecedented foreign pressure and intense domestic polarisation. Voter turnout was the highest (58.97%) of Armenia's past three parliamentary elections, reflecting greater voter mobilisation than in recent electoral cycles and the extent to which many voters perceived the election as consequential in terms of the peace process.

As is so often the case, international observers strongly condemned direct external pressure, primarily from the Russian authorities. This included punitive trade measures, temporary agricultural restrictions and warnings intended to dissuade voters from backing Armenia's pro-European geopolitical shift. International intervention in the elections was not only from Russia, but also from the West, in particular the United States and France, the presidents of which clearly indicated their support for the incumbent.

## **The roots of Russian influence in Armenia**

For several decades, Armenia had been perceived as one of Russia's most dependable partners. The foundation for Russian political, economic and cultural influence was the [1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance](#), which provided for a mutual defence mechanism that stipulated that in the event of an armed attack by a third country on either Armenia or Russia, each nation would be obliged to use its joint military facilities and equipment to assist the other. Other cornerstones of the security sphere were Russia's 102nd military base in Gyumri, Armenia's membership of the Russia-led CSTO military alliance and the presence of Russian Security Service (FSB) Border Guard troops at Armenia's external borders with Iran and Türkiye. However, in 2024, Russian border guards were removed from Zvartnots International Airport.

Armenia's [economic dependence](#) on Russia remains deeply entrenched. Russia has consistently been one of Armenia's largest trading partners, accounting for over one-third of Armenia's external trade and approximately 36 per cent of its exports. Armenia relies on Russia for more than 80 per cent of its imports of natural gas, which is provided at discounted rates. Furthermore, Russia's state-owned Rosatom maintains and is overseeing the extension of the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, which generates a large proportion of Armenia's electricity. Good Russia-Armenia relations more or less continued when Nikol Pashinyan came to power in the Velvet Revolution in 2018, despite Russia's suspicion of leaders who come to power through popular uprisings. Relations started to deteriorate in 2020, however, following the Second Karabakh War. When Azerbaijan attacked Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia appealed to Russia for military assistance under the bilateral defence treaty. Moscow responded that the

defence treaty only applied to Armenia's internationally recognised sovereign borders and not to the disputed territories of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, when Azerbaijan attacked Armenia's internationally recognised territory in 2021 and 2022, occupying close to 200 square kilometres, and Yerevan officially invoked Article 4 of the CSTO Charter, which mandates collective military assistance if a member is attacked, the CSTO refused to provide military support, instead calling for diplomatic solutions.

Finally, in [Azerbaijan's military offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh](#) in September 2023, which allowed Baku to restore full control over the region and led to an exodus of 100,000 Karabakh Armenians, Moscow again refused to support Armenia. The roughly 1,960 Russian 'peacekeepers' in the region stayed largely inactive. Instead, Russian officials blamed Armenia's pro-western foreign policy for the escalation and Russian propagandists even tried to foment anti-government protests in Yerevan.

The repeated decision by Moscow not to uphold its security guarantees led to profound disillusionment in Armenia. Against this backdrop, [Armenia has been diversifying](#) its international alliances and strengthening its economic ties with the EU and the United States, while distancing itself from Russia. Armenia is thus a prime example of a country that initially chose partnership with Russia over the EU – in part due to intense Russian pressure – but was disappointed by the lack of commitment on the Russian side. The recent pivot to Europe is therefore a result of Russia's own policy on Armenia, which emphasises subordination instead of partnership or alliance.

## Russian election interference

In the 2026 Armenian parliamentary elections, Russia deployed an intense campaign of pressure to undermine Prime Minister Pashinyan and halt Armenia's pivot towards the EU. International election observers, including the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe \(PACE\)](#), condemned Moscow's actions as "blatant interference".

The Kremlin's strategy relied on a variety of tactics, the first of which was [economic coercion](#) and blackmail. In the weeks leading up to the 7 June vote, the Kremlin imposed sweeping bans on Armenian exports, which included blocking the import of Armenian cognac, wine, flowers, fish, fruit and vegetables. The Kremlin also explicitly threatened to cut Armenia's access to favourably priced Russian natural gas and petroleum products, which underpins much of the country's energy infrastructure. Russia warned Armenia that it would lose its preferential regional trade benefits within the EAEU if it continued to integrate with the EU.

The second tactic was disinformation and [information warfare](#). Kremlin-linked network operations had begun targeting the Armenian electorate more than a year before the vote. Russian information influence structures, such as the large-scale bot ecosystem "Matryoshka", disseminated fake campaign materials, which were styled as emanating from western media, to discredit the Armenian authorities and the prime minister personally.

The third tactic was political and geopolitical intimidation. In a warning to Armenian voters, in highly publicised remarks, Russian President Vladimir [Putin compared](#) the country's EU ambitions to Ukraine's path before Russia's invasion, threatening Armenia with a "Ukrainian scenario". Moscow also supported pro-Russian candidates in the elections. Rather than backing a single party, Moscow funded and promoted several pro-Russia political factions. However, Moscow's support for pro-Russian parties was not as great as its efforts to undermine the incumbent government and weaken trust in the electoral system and democratic institutions.

Moscow also has an interest in repairing relations with Yerevan, however, as trade with Russia constitutes an important aspect of its sanctions evasion. This is a tricky balancing act for Armenia, as the EU can only tackle such evasion with the cooperation of the Armenian government.

## Armenia-EU relations

For over a decade, Armenia's relations with the EU were defined by Armenia's 2013 decision to decline an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. In a volte-face, Armenia's then-president Serzh Sargsyan, under pressure from Russia, rejected the already negotiated AA and opted instead for a Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, which in 2015 became the Eurasian Economic Union. Armenia's membership of a Eurasian customs union limits its options in terms of cooperation and especially integration with the EU, and will require creativity on both sides. It will not be possible to return to the AA or to negotiate a new free trade agreement (FTA), which is the usual step in the EU integration process preceding a membership application.

The formal framework for the EU-Armenia partnership is thus the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which was signed in 2017 and entered into force in 2021. The current visa liberalisation dialogue and the civilian EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA) along sections of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, which has been in place since 2023, are among the EU's main tools for incentivising alignment. The EU assisted Armenia significantly with its electoral resilience, applying some of the lessons learned from successful strategies to counter the massive Russian influence campaign in [Moldova in 2025](#). The EU is also supporting Armenia's constitutional, judicial and rule of law reform efforts, although the level of ambition is lower than with countries that have formal candidate status.

The EU still regards Armenia as part of the Eastern Partnership, the eastern part of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, which was originally tailored to include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Eastern Partnership has in effect been all but dissolved, however, given Belarus' shift firmly into Russia's sphere of influence and the low level of ambition in EU-Azerbaijan relations, on the one hand, and the EU's decision to grant Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine candidate status in 2022, on the other.

Armenia's disillusionment with its partnership with Russia has led to a significant reassessment of the EU track. In April 2026, a new civilian mission under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, the [EU Partnership Mission](#) (EUPM), was set up to help Armenia strengthen resilience against hybrid threats such as disinformation, cyberattacks and illicit financial flows, while also supporting government capacity-building and offering strategic advice. The mission follows the same principles as the one of the same name in Moldova, which was established in 2023.

Furthermore, the first-ever EU-Armenia summit took place in Yerevan on 4–5 May 2026. The resulting 44-point [joint declaration](#) included not only economic cooperation and people-to-people opportunities, but also new levels of ambition on security and defence cooperation. The EU summit was preceded by the 8th summit of the European Political Community (EPC) in Yerevan on 4 May, which gathered together 48 leaders of European states, the EU institutions, NATO and Canada. The timing of these two summits, roughly a month before the parliamentary elections and just days before the election campaign kicked off on 8 May, became a demonstration of support for the incumbent, Pashinyan.

## Perspectives from Yerevan on cooperation with the EU

Support for closer engagement with the European Union [remains high](#) in Armenia. This growth in support has coincided with declining confidence in Russia as Armenia's principal security partner and the EU's growing visibility in the country through initiatives such as EUMA, the visa liberalisation dialogue and expanded political engagement.

Visa liberalisation is one of the most anticipated elements of cooperation with the EU and widely seen as a tangible measure of progress in EU–Armenia relations. However, positive views of the EU do not necessarily translate into expectations of a stronger security role. While EUMA is widely regarded as a successful initiative, discussions about security continue to place greater emphasis on bilateral partnerships, particularly with the United States and France, as well as Armenia's own defence capabilities.

For many Armenians, the appeal of closer ties with the EU is primarily associated with concrete benefits such as enhanced mobility, education opportunities and economic prospects. For the ruling Civil Contract party, cooperation with the EU is embedded in a broader political project to diversify Armenia's foreign relations, advance domestic reforms and support the government's peace agenda following Russia's unwillingness to act as Armenia's security guarantor. Rather than presenting European integration as a binary choice between East and West, the government has generally framed cooperation with the EU as a way to enhance Armenia's sovereignty, resilience and long-term development.

It is tempting to assume that younger Armenians constitute the strongest constituency for closer integration with Europe. However, unlike in several other Eastern Partnership countries, support for closer ties with the EU is not particularly youth-driven. While attitudes to Europe are broadly positive, the EU has not escaped the broader scepticism with which many young Armenians view political actors and institutions. The unmet expectations of the 2018 revolution, together with the succession of military setbacks and security crises since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, have reinforced the perception that political actors are unable to deliver meaningful change. This is reflected in persistently low levels of trust in political leaders, particularly among younger voters. In a May 2026 [survey](#), among Armenians aged 18 to 35, only 15 per cent identified Pashinyan as the political figure they trusted most, while a majority (53 per cent) were unable to identify *any* political figure they trusted.

This pattern reflects broader trends in Armenian society. While the government has successfully established itself as the main political vehicle for closer relations with the EU, many pro-European Armenians are also critical of the ruling Civil Contract party, but smaller pro-European parties have struggled to convert these sentiments into sustained political support. The distinction between support for European integration and support for the government is particularly visible in Yerevan, where attitudes to the government tend to be more critical than in many rural areas. More broadly, support for European integration increasingly coexists with concerns about democratic backsliding, including allegations of selective justice, pressure on independent media and growing centralisation.

At the same time, Armenian politics is heavily shaped by a binary framing that presents the main political choice as one between the ruling party and its predominantly pro-Russian opponents, leaving limited space for alternative pro-European forces. This has contributed to political disengagement and hindered the emergence of credible democratic alternatives.

As a result, support for European integration should not be conflated with support for the government. This creates a dilemma for the EU, as the close association between Armenia's European trajectory and the ruling Civil Contract party could prove both a political asset and a long-term vulnerability for its engagement in the country.

## Perspectives from Brussels on cooperation with Armenia

For the EU, the outcome of the election opened the door for deeper political cooperation with and support to Armenia. The question is still not about EU integration – not even candidate status – but about enhanced cooperation anchored in an overall [Strategic Agenda](#) for the EU-Armenia Partnership. The EU is generally willing to take more responsibility for its neighbourhood and seeking to engage more deeply with Armenia, now that internal Armenian dynamics allow.

However, given Armenia's continued membership of Russia-led economic and security organisations, such as its membership of the EAEU, frozen membership of the CSTO and partner status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the point of departure for closer relations with the EU is radically different than in past cases, including neighbouring Georgia. The depth of Armenia's bilateral relations with Russia, which encompass security and trade, places limits on information sharing and investment in some areas. On the other hand, the EU is willing to work with Armenia on information security to improve sharing of classified information and border management, with a view to enabling Armenia to reduce cooperation with Russian FSB personnel on its borders.

Thus, given the sensitivities of Armenia's geopolitical situation, the EU needs to design cooperation with Armenia in a different way. From the EU's perspective, there is no question of integration any time soon, but only of gradual regulatory alignment. The EU's €270 million Resilience and Growth Plan is an important financial element steering the direction of cooperation towards Armenia's socio-economic reform agenda, sectoral cooperation and investment in energy, transport and the private sector. Security-related cooperation has also become more substantial in recent years. Since 2024, Armenia has received €30 million in non-lethal assistance to its armed forces from the European Peace Facility. In addition to the EU's presence in Armenia through the EUAM and the EUPM, Brussels is interested in enabling Armenia's participation as a partner in its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations.

Connectivity is a particularly pertinent question for Armenia, and an interest shared with the EU. Given its isolated geographical situation, and its closed borders with both Azerbaijan and Türkiye, Armenia is dependent on trade and transit routes through Georgia and Iran. That said, Armenia's location could present opportunities. If the current peace process with Azerbaijan leads to better access to and from Armenia, including through Türkiye, it could become part of the 'Middle Corridor' of land transport to Asia, bypassing Russian territory. Connectivity features prominently in the recent EU-Armenia summit declaration, including the EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership on transport, energy and digital technologies, the EU-Armenia High-Level Dialogue on Connectivity and the EU-Armenia High-Level Transport Dialogue. Through its Global Gateway initiative, a flagship strategy to mobilise up to €300 billion in sustainable, high-quality infrastructure investment worldwide, EU investments in Armenia are expected to reach €2.5 billion.

The EU is willing and has committed to continue on the path of stepwise alignment, building up infrastructure and opening borders first before taking bigger political steps. Given the [negative experience with Georgia](#), however, the appetite among EU member states for

another membership application from the South Caucasus is probably limited. Instead, the EU would prefer a more pragmatic approach that allows sectoral integration and cooperation wherever feasible, without having to address the more political question of membership, which currently appears to be a faraway prospect. There is a sense in Brussels that the full potential of all elements of the current partnership has not yet been exploited, as a result of Armenia's balancing act between its remaining dependencies on Russia and new steps with the EU. Armenia's membership of the EAEU cannot be replaced by a customs union with the EU any time soon.

An official membership application from Armenia might also trigger a stronger, potentially even kinetic response from Russia, to which the EU would be neither able nor willing to respond. On the other hand, Russia's current negative trajectory in its war in Ukraine could provide an opportunity from Yerevan's perspective to apply while Russia is unlikely to be able to mobilise significant resources against it – not least because the countries do not share a direct border. Russia is already employing economic coercion against Armenia in retaliation. However, the EU is better equipped and more willing to support Armenia on economic questions. The EU is already helping to redirect Armenian agricultural products to the EU market, amid recent Russian economic pressure which has blockaded Armenian food exports. The EU has also provided a €50 million aid package to Yerevan. Russian moves could therefore backfire and instead help to accelerate Armenia's European turn.

## Conclusions and policy recommendations for the EU

The 7 June 2026 parliamentary election reinforced Armenia's European orientation and created new opportunities for closer EU-Armenia cooperation. At the same time, however, it exposed important constraints. While support for European integration remains strong, trust in domestic political actors is weaker. Moreover, Armenia's economic and energy dependence on Russia means that any shift towards Europe will continue to be shaped by the need to balance relations with Moscow.

For the EU, the election outcome provides an opportunity to deepen engagement with Armenia, while recognising the country's domestic political dynamics and geopolitical vulnerabilities. The following recommendations outline how the EU can support Armenia's European trajectory while strengthening its resilience and regional stability.

- **The EU should strengthen its support to Armenia's democratic institutions rather than the government.** A key lesson from Georgia is that geopolitical alignment should not be mistaken for democratic consolidation. The EU should therefore complement its cooperation with state institutions by investing in relations with democratic competition, helping to ensure that Armenia's European trajectory remains resilient beyond the tenure of any individual government.
- **In the peace process with Azerbaijan, Brussels should focus on robust conflict prevention, facilitating cross-border integration and leveraging its diplomatic and financial tools.** This can be done in the negotiations on Partnership Priorities and the new Comprehensive Agreement between Azerbaijan and the EU, and by supporting connectivity and infrastructure projects in accordance with the Global Gateway strategy.
- **The EU should enhance support for Armenia's security and resilience.** The EU is well-placed to mitigate any economic fallout in Armenia from Russian coercion. Beyond economic measures, the EU should work with the Armenian authorities to identify critical vulnerabilities in other sectors, such as energy, and prepare mitigation strategies. Such strategies, however, will require progress on the peace process with Azerbaijan.



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