



## Armenia

### Cautious about Rapprochement with the EU and U.S.

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In early January, Armenia signalled its desire for rapprochement with the EU by additionally signing a Strategic Partnership Charter with the U.S at the same time. This is another move that gradually changes the direction of its foreign policy from pro-Russian to pro-Western. However, fearing a negative reaction from Russia, Armenia remains cautious: it has not demanded the closure of Russian military bases on its territory, declares it will remain in the Eurasian Economic Union, and limits itself only to suspending its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. This direction of Armenia's foreign policy is expected to continue in the near future.

The reorientation of Armenia's foreign policy is due to disillusionment by both the authorities and public with the lack of Russian support during the [Second Karabakh War](#), subsequent incidents on the border with Azerbaijan, and in 2023 the [complete takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh \(NK\) by Azerbaijan](#). As a member of the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Armenia waited in vain for its allies to respond to the Azerbaijani offensive. The lack of a reaction resulted in anti-Russian sentiment—trust in Russia dropped from 87% in 2019 to 35% in 2024, according to a survey by the International Republican Institute—and the nation's leaders began looking for new security guarantors in the EU and the U.S.

**Armenia's Integration with the EU.** For the past two years, the EU's interest in Armenia has visibly increased, with the aim of preventing a resumption of armed hostilities with Azerbaijan and integration into the EU. In February 2023, the EU sent the [EUMA civilian mission to Armenia](#) to monitor the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. In addition, in 2024 it began a visa-liberalisation dialogue with Armenia. It also provided multi-year funding under the European Peace Facility (€10 million) and announced it would allocate €270 million over four years under the Resilience and Growth Plan.

In January, the Armenian authorities made a cautious effort to move closer to the EU. The pro-Western parties of the

extra-parliamentary opposition referred to the parliament, along with 52,000 signatures of citizens, a bill "on initiating the process of Armenia's membership in the EU". It assumes the start of procedures for Armenia's integration into the EU and the holding of a referendum on the issue. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, on the one hand, announced that the bill would be supported by his Civil Contract party, but, on the other, he noted that the adoption of the law would not automatically imply a decision on Armenia's accession to the EU, a stance that could be explained by caution due to concerns about Russia's possible reaction. He also stressed that Armenia should not expect quick accession to the EU. The conservative approach to European integration is also evidenced by Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan's statement indicating that the law is only meant to emphasise Armenia's dynamic relations with the EU.

Armenian-EU rapprochement may also be seen in the announcement in January by Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan that the completion of negotiations on the New Armenia-EU Partnership Programme is imminent. It is to include cooperation on democratic reforms and ensuring Armenia's socio-economic stability. The agreement is expected to be concluded in the coming months.

**Armenia's Strategic Partnership with the U.S.** This past year has seen a strengthening of Armenia's relations with the U.S. In April 2024, the U.S. pledged to provide Armenia with [\\$65 million to support reform and Euro-Atlantic integration](#), launched a strategic dialogue with Armenia in June, and held joint military exercises in September. In turn, Foreign Minister Mirzoyan and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken signed the Armenia-U.S. Strategic Partnership Charter in Washington in January. The document envisages cooperation in many areas and is expected to result in raising bilateral relations to a higher level and building Armenia's resilience against Russia. According to the Armenian authorities, the charter was consulted with the incoming administration of Donald Trump, but after Pashinyan met with Vice President J.D. Vance in Washington in February this year, Vance did not publicly declare the implementation of the document's provisions.

The U.S. intends to support Armenia in its integration into the global economy, work to increase bilateral trade and investment, and increase Armenia's energy production and diversify its sources of supply. Cooperation is to include the development of civilian nuclear energy (Armenia is seeking a contractor for a new power plant to replace Metsamor, which is expected to cease operations by 2036). In addition, the charter calls for U.S. support in Armenia's [taking control of its borders from Russia](#). A group of U.S. customs and border security experts is scheduled to travel to Armenia in the near future to assist it in this regard.

The charter provides for defence consultations, joint military exercises, and reform programmes aimed at increasing the Armenian military's interoperability and strengthening its defence capabilities. It also assumes U.S. support for the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process and the unblocking of transport routes in the South Caucasus region. The document also included a declaration on the continuation of U.S. assistance to Armenian refugees from the NK.

**Armenia's Relations with Russia.** The Russian government received the announcements about Armenia's rapprochement with the EU and the U.S. with relative calm. They stressed that Armenia's integration with the EU is impossible because of its membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and that Russia considers Armenia's discussion of EU accession as a step toward its exit from the EEU. They argue that Armenia would lose out economically, as it would result in higher prices for energy and food imports from Russia and a drop of about 70-80% in Armenian goods exports to EEU member states.

The Armenian government has no plans to withdraw from the EEU. This is dictated by the strong economic and trade dependence on Russia and the distant prospect of rapprochement with the EU. In addition to the absence of tariffs and preferential access to EEU members' markets, Armenia's presence in the EEU gives Armenia other advantages, such as not having to meet the high phytosanitary standards required by the EU. Trade with EEU

countries in the first 11 months of 2024 accounted for 42% of Armenia's total trade (up more than 68% year on year) and almost entirely with Russia (more than 97%), while with the EU it was only 7.5% (down 11.7%). This is due to Armenia's *de facto* circumvention of Western sanctions imposed on Russia by re-exporting Western products (including mobile phones, computers, headphones, diamonds, gold) to its northern neighbour. Formally, re-exports are not subject to sanctions. The authorities' conservative approach is also due to Russia's control of many key sectors of the Armenian economy (energy, railroads, telecommunications) and its role as a major supplier of gas and grain.

However, Armenia has reduced its dependence on Russia by achieving the withdrawal of Russian border guards from the Zvartnots airport in Yerevan and the Agarak checkpoint on the Armenian-Iranian border. In the future, Armenia will want to assume full responsibility for the borders with Iran and Turkey, but its authorities are not, for the time being, making demands for the dismantling of Russian military bases in Armenia, in particular the land forces in Gyumri and air forces in Erebuni, nor are they deciding to leave the CSTO.

**Conclusions and Perspectives.** The Armenian government, since the loss of control over the NK and disappointment over the lack of Russian and CSTO assistance in the conflict with Azerbaijan, has begun to change its foreign policy course. It is now multi-vector in nature. On the one hand, the authorities are taking steps towards rapprochement with the U.S. and the EU, while, on the other, they are trying to maintain correct relations with Russia.

Armenia's membership in the EEU brings it many benefits. Armenia's exit from the organisation would result in an economic crisis in the country. Therefore, if the EU and the U.S. want to strengthen Armenia's integration with the West, they should firmly strengthen economic ties with the country and support it financially to reduce losses from a future exit from the EEU. In addition to economic pressure, the Armenian authorities may also fear destabilising actions from Russia, including an attempt to overthrow them, informal support for Azerbaijan in the event of renewed armed conflict with Armenia due to a lack of progress on demarcation and delimitation of the border, or Armenia's agreement to unblock transport routes in the region, or even direct Russian military intervention (an unlikely scenario at present).

Poland could support the strengthening of Armenia's relations with the EU by encouraging Member States to increase financial support to Armenia with the aim of independence from Russia and internal reforms. In addition, Poland could encourage the EU to become more involved in negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan to bring about lasting peace in the South Caucasus. This would increase the EU's activity and visibility in Armenia alongside the recent two-year extension of the EU civilian mission in the country.