



**EECMD**

EASTERN EUROPEAN CENTRE  
FOR MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY

# TRUMP ROUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND PROSPERITY AND ARMENIA'S

**“CROSSROADS OF PEACE”**

**INITIATIVE: REGIONAL  
IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES**

---

**RESEARCH PAPER**

*by Stepan Safaryan*

**TRUMP ROUTE FOR  
INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND  
PROSPERITY AND ARMENIA'S  
“CROSSROADS OF PEACE”  
INITIATIVE: REGIONAL  
IMPLICATIONS AND  
CHALLENGES**

RESEARCH PAPER

*by Stepan Safaryan*

## Disclaimer

This publication was commissioned by the Eastern European Centre for Multi-party Democracy (EECMD) as part of a project funded by the Danish Social Liberal and Danish Institute for Parties and Democracies (DIPD). The content and opinions expressed within this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of EECMD or its donor organizations.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>List of Acronyms</b> .....	4
<b>About the Policy Paper and Methodology</b> .....	5
<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>Peace Agreement and TRIPP: Interlinked Bilateral and Trilateral Agendas under US Guarantees and Trilateral Arrangements</b> .....	7
Boundary-Transcending Framework of Armenian–American Strategic Cooperation .....	8
<b>Regional and Domestic Triggers and Accelerators for the Crossroads of Peace and the Peace Agenda: Outstanding Challenges on the Ground</b> .....	11
Armenia’s Post-War Disillusionments .....	11
The Imminent Risk of Large-Scale Conflict and Russia’s Role .....	12
Russia is not a security guarantors, nor a honest broker of peace but a beneficiary of the conflict .....	15
The Unblocking of Armenia in the Russia–Armenia–Azerbaijan Format Is Either Impossible or Dangerous for Armenia .....	21
<b>The Crossroads of Peace: An Ambitious Program for Integration into the “West–East” and “North–South” Transport Routes</b> .....	22
<b>From Obscurity to Visibility in Global Transport Projects</b> .....	27
<b>Armenia and the Intensifying “Game of Corridors” in the Wider Region</b> .....	30
<b>Changing Behaviors and Trajectories</b> .....	35
The Ankara Pivot: Integrating Armenia into the Middle Corridor without Compromising the Azerbaijan Alliance .....	35
Azerbaijan’s Obstructionism vs. Strategic Necessity: Between Regional Competition and the Pursuit of a Strategic Partnership with the U.S. ....	36
Complementary or Competitive? Georgia’s Quest for Regional Stability and Infrastructure Quotas .....	37
The Russian Shadow: Hybrid Tactics and Infrastructure Leverage in the New Caucasian Transit Game .....	37
Between Resistance and Participation: Iran’s Strategic Response to the Armenian-American Transit Initiatives .....	39
Connecting the Corridors: Integrating Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan into Armenia’s Strategic Vision .....	40
The New Silk Road Diplomacy: Aligning Armenia’s Crossroads of Peace with the Strategic Interests of India, China, and Pakistan .....	41
A Value-Based Architecture: Strategic Alignment Between the European Union and the Crossroads of Peace .....	43
<b>Strategic Conclusions</b> .....	45
<b>Policy Recommendations</b> .....	48
<b>Useful notes</b> .....	49

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AI</b>	— Artificial intelligence
<b>BRI</b>	— Belt and Road Initiative
<b>CCWAEC</b>	— China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic Corridor
<b>CEPA</b>	— Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
<b>CIS</b>	— Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>CJSC</b>	— Closed Joint-Stock Company
<b>CSTO</b>	— Collective Security Treaty Organization
<b>DC</b>	— Washington, DC (District of Columbia)
<b>EAEU</b>	— Eurasian Economic Union
<b>ECHR</b>	— European Court of Human Rights
<b>EPCA</b>	— Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
<b>EU</b>	— European Union
<b>FSB</b>	— Federal Security Service (Russia)
<b>GLOBSEC</b>	— GLOBSEC forum
<b>ICJ</b>	— International Court of Justice
<b>INOGATE</b>	— INOGATE programme
<b>INSTC</b>	— North-South Corridor (INSTC)
<b>JSC</b>	— Joint-Stock Company
<b>MoU</b>	— Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NSTC</b>	— North–South Transport Corridor
<b>OSCE</b>	— Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>OTS</b>	— Organization of Turkic States
<b>PM</b>	— Prime Minister
<b>SCO</b>	— Shanghai Cooperation Organization
<b>SCR</b>	— South Caucasus Railway
<b>SSR</b>	— Soviet Socialist Republic (as in Armenian SSR)
<b>TIF</b>	— TRIPP Implementation Framework
<b>TITR</b>	— Trans-Caspian International Transport Route
<b>TRACECA</b>	— Europe–Caucasus–Asia Transport Corridor
<b>TRIPP</b>	— Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity
<b>UAE</b>	— United Arab Emirates
<b>UN</b>	— United Nations
<b>US</b>	— United States
<b>USA</b>	— United States of America(not defined in text)

## ABOUT THE POLICY PAPER AND METHODOLOGY

This paper explores the regional implications and challenges of Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" initiative within the TRIPP framework, amid a geopolitical landscape reshaped by the 2025 Armenia–Azerbaijan peace deal.

The paper's primary objectives are to examine the strategic foundations of the initiative and analyze its economic, security, and geopolitical effects on Armenia, the South Caucasus, and the European Union. By identifying key risks and institutional prerequisites, the paper proposes recommendations to align Armenia's connectivity vision with its national development priorities and international obligations.

The analysis is based on a comprehensive review of the regulatory legal frameworks and obligations underpinning the Crossroads of Peace and TRIPP initiatives, evaluated against regional developments spanning the last 30 years. Furthermore, this study draws on extensive off-the-record discussions, including confidential consultations with high-ranking officials and diplomats, conducted under the condition of anonymity.

## INTRODUCTION

The "Crossroads of Peace" initiative, officially publicized by the Government of Armenia in the autumn of 2023, was profoundly shaped by the geopolitical environment and evolving security architecture that emerged in the aftermath of the 2020 Second Karabakh War and Russia's subsequent aggression against Ukraine.

On 27 September 2020, Armenia became directly involved in the unprovoked 44-day war launched by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh (also referred to as Artsakh), acting as the security guarantor of an internationally unrecognized entity. The war's outcome and its far-reaching consequences generated deep strategic uncertainty and exposed both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh to severe internal and external pressures. Over time, these challenges acquired an increasingly existential dimension, directly affecting the foundations of Armenian statehood—its sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. The situation was further aggravated by developments concerning Nagorno-Karabakh between 2020 and 2023 resulting in ethnic cleansing of the Armenian-populated region, the deterioration of the regional and global geopolitical environment, and accumulated strategic miscalculations over the three decades of Armenia's post-independence trajectory.

Against this backdrop of structural vulnerability and shifting power balances, the Crossroads of Peace initiative emerged as a strategic recalibration—an attempt to redefine Armenia's security paradigm, reposition the country within regional connectivity frameworks, and anchor its long-term stability in new patterns of economic integration and interdependence.

The negotiations held on 8 August 2025 in the United States capital, Washington, with the participation of President Donald J. Trump, namely the US–Armenia, US–Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan–Armenia, and finally US–Armenia–Azerbaijan formats, and the documents initialed and signed by the heads of states and the ministers of foreign affairs, which have conventionally come to be collectively referred to as the Washington Agreements, aspire to open a new chapter in history not only for Azerbaijan and Armenia, which for nearly thirty years had regarded each other as existential enemies, but also for the entire Caucasus and the broader region.

It is indeed difficult to assess in advance the full spectrum of political, economic, transport, social, cultural, and value-based consequences and their projections across range and time. Nevertheless, these developments are intended to break sealed borders, transform conflict contact lines into modern secure borders, dismantle stereotypes and fears, establish civilized relations among individuals, states, and businesses, ensure the diversity of transport routes and the unobstructed transit of people, goods, and cargoes along multiple directions, and ultimately reshape paradigms, policies, and behaviors in the way all parties perceive the world.



The signing ceremony of the Trilateral Declaration of the Washington Accords at the White House, August 8, 2025

Seven documents were agreed and signed in Washington on 8 August, 2025:

- 1 the initialed Agreement on Establishment of Peace and Inter-State Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- 2 the Joint Declaration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, and the President of the United States of America on the outcomes of their meeting in Washington, DC;
- 3 the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Armenia regarding the Crossroads of Peace Capacity Building Partnership;
- 4 the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Armenia regarding an Energy Security Partnership;
- 5 the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Armenia regarding an AI and Semiconductor Innovation Partnership;
- 6 the Joint Appeal of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe regarding the dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Process and related structures;
- 7 the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Establishment of a Strategic Working Group to develop a Charter on Strategic Partnership between the United States of America and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

## PEACE AGREEMENT AND TRIPP: INTERLINKED BILATERAL AND TRILATERAL AGENDAS UNDER US GUARANTEES AND TRILATERAL ARRANGEMENTS

Under the **Agreement on Establishment of Peace and Inter-State Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan**<sup>1</sup>, consisting of 17 articles, the Parties have undertaken to respect and recognize each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political independence, and to refrain both from actions involving the use of force or the threat thereof against them and from allowing their territories to be used by third countries for such actions; to establish diplomatic relations; to act in accordance with international law; to be guided in their relations by international law and by the obligations assumed under the Agreement; to delimit and demarcate the interstate border; not to deploy third-party forces along the common border; not to advance territorial claims against one another; not to interfere in each other's internal affairs; not to encourage intolerance, racial hatred, discrimination, separatism, violent extremism, or terrorism, and to combat all such phenomena; to cooperate in humanitarian, trade, economic, transport, environmental, cultural, and other fields; and to resolve all disputes and disagreements by peaceful means, through bilateral consultations and within commissions, without the use or threat of force, and, where this proves impossible, to seek other peaceful means of dispute settlement.

Among the Washington Agreements package, probably the highest status is attributed to **Joint Declaration by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the United States of America on the outcomes of their meeting in Washington D.C., United States of America**<sup>2</sup>.

First of all, despite of the fact that it does not possess the status of the international treaty and United States of America signed it as a "witness", it makes the American side a high guarantor and a patron for implementation of bilateral and trilateral agreements. Second, the trilateral declaration stipulated "the need to continue further actions to achieve the signing and ultimate ratification of the Agreement agreed upon and initialed by Armenia and Azerbaijan, and emphasized "the importance of maintaining and strengthening peace between two countries." Third, the Trilateral Declaration has incorporated **the fundamental principles, objectives, commitments, and actions agreed between Azerbaijan and Armenia, reaffirming political commitment to their irreversibility and to non-retreat**. In particular:

- "charting a course for a bright future not bound by the conflict of the past", "building good neighborly relations between the two nations consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and the 1991 Almaty Declaration, on the basis of the inviolability of international borders and the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory after the conflict, which, "as a reality, is not and should never be subject to revision", and "paving the way for closing the chapter of enmity between two nations, resolutely rejecting and excluding any attempt of revenge, now and in the future,"

<sup>1</sup> *Initialed Agreement on Establishment of Peace and Inter-State Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan, 08.08.2025, Official website of the MFA of RA*  
<sup>2</sup> *Joint Declaration by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the United States of America on the outcomes of their meeting in Washington D.C., United States of America, 08.08.2025*

- ***“opening of communications between the two countries for intra-state, bilateral, and international transportation for the promotion of peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and in its neighborhood on the basis of respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdiction of the States”, “unimpeded connectivity between the main part of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic through the territory of the Republic of Armenia with reciprocal benefits for international and intra-state connectivity for the Republic of Armenia,”***
- ***Joint work by the US, Armenia and mutually determined third parties to set forth a framework for the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity” (TRIPP) connectivity project in the territory of the Republic of Armenia”, and acting “in good faith to achieve this goal in the most expeditious manner,”***
- ***the joint appeal to the participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to adopt a decision on the closure of OSCE’s Minsk Process and related structures based on the letter signed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan.***
- ***Recognizing the Washington Summit as a strong foundation for mutual respect and the advancement of peace in the region, i.e. a platform for the implementation of the bilateral and multilateral commitments in the good faith.***

Thus, through the Washington Declaration, the implementation of the obligations undertaken under the Armenia–Azerbaijan bilateral agreement has been reaffirmed at the trilateral US–Armenia–Azerbaijan level; these have been complemented by a trilateral agenda, while the execution and irreversibility of all of the above have been cemented by a US guarantee and by the political commitments assumed by the Parties.

However, an indirect yet no less significant complement to these two analyzed agreements is also provided by the three memoranda signed in the Armenia–United States bilateral format, in which the objectives and actions enshrined are closely interconnected with, and serve to complement, the TRIPP framework and other trilateral and bilateral commitments.

## Boundary-Transcending Framework of Armenian–American Strategic Cooperation

The 2025 Armenian–U.S. Strategic Partnership framework—comprising the January Strategic Partnership Charter and three Memoranda of Understanding signed in August—establishes a comprehensive legal and institutional basis for Armenia’s infrastructural, security, energy, and technological modernization.

At its core is the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative, supported by the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) “Regarding the Crossroads of Peace Capacity Building Partnership,”**<sup>3</sup> that focuses on enhancing Armenia’s infrastructure, border security, customs efficiency, cybersecurity, and law-enforcement capacities.

<sup>3</sup> Memoranda of Understanding signed between the Republic of Armenia and the United States, 08.08.2025

The initiative is framed as a sovereignty-based connectivity model, explicitly reaffirming U.S. support for Armenia’s territorial integrity and internationally recognized borders. It aims to transform Armenia into an efficient regional transit hub while strengthening its institutional resilience against illicit trafficking, smuggling, and cyber threats. The intentions and forms of cooperation extend not only to Armenia’s “Crossroads of Peace” initiative, but also to TRIPP, regarded as one of its key components.

These and other relevant objectives have been embedded within the broader **Strategic Partnership Charter between Armenia and the United States**<sup>4</sup>, signed earlier-on January 14, 2025, which elevates bilateral relations to the level of a strategic partnership and outlines cooperation in economic development, trade, transport, energy, defense, democracy, and governance. The Charter reaffirms support for “the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the border delimitation process based upon the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration; for “the normalization of relations between Armenia and its neighbors”; for “the movement of goods and people and the establishment of interdependence and mutually beneficial relations between neighbors” (referring equally to Turkey and Azerbaijan); and for “the unblocking of regional transport communications in the South Caucasus, based on full respect for the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the countries concerned.”

Within the defense and security dimension of the Charter, several objectives are particularly relevant to the subject of this research. These include expanding defense and security cooperation programs, establishing bilateral defense consultations, and providing professional military education and assistance to the Armenian armed forces; strengthening interoperability and defense reform; and combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and dangerous technologies through adherence to international nonproliferation standards and effective export control enforcement. In this context, the United States has expressed its intention to support capacity building within the Armenian Border Guard Service and the State Revenue Committee.

Cooperation also extends to “working toward an innovative, secure, and rights-respecting digital future,” including regular consultations on emerging cyber threats, and to fostering rights-respecting institutions through support for reform and modernization of Armenia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs and law enforcement agencies. Such support encompasses police education, public safety measures, accountability mechanisms for abuses, and efforts to combat transnational crime and corruption.

The stated objectives also include enforcement of export controls for dual-use goods; facilitating greater access to U.S. Commerce export-controlled technology by trusted companies operating in Armenia; strengthening the agricultural trade environment in the context of trade diversification, food security, and economic growth; and deepening cooperation aimed at integrating Armenia—given its landlocked position and limited access to global markets—into wider regional transport networks and connectivity initiatives, including through strong political support for Armenia’s “Crossroads of Peace” project.

Additional objectives include responding to semiconductor and AI development priorities: encouraging private-sector investment and public-private partnerships; facilitating academic and research cooperation, potentially including the establishment of an Armenia–USA binational science foundation; strengthening export control mechanisms; preventing diversion of AI resources; promoting responsible AI development; enhancing information exchange on best practices; and advancing workforce readiness and infrastructure development in Armenia’s high-tech sector.

In the field of economic, trade, transport, and energy cooperation, the Charter envisages “increasing bilateral trade and investment as drivers of economic growth and development” and “exploring opportunities to increase and diversify Armenia’s energy production and supplies.” This implies development of a civil nuclear power program consistent with the highest standards of nuclear safety, security, and nonproliferation; enhancing energy security and efficiency, including through a significant increase in the share of renewables in Armenia’s energy mix; and measures to strengthen Armenia’s energy connectivity to regional and European markets.

<sup>4</sup> Charter on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Armenia and the United States of America, signed on 14.01.2025

Thus, the vast infrastructure complex envisioned under the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative and its TRIPP component—intended to facilitate intensified freight and passenger flows across Armenia from north to south and west to east, as well as expanded international trade via railway and road networks—will inevitably generate new challenges, including heightened risks of cross-border crime and cybercrime. Its successful implementation therefore presupposes not only enhanced border, customs, and law enforcement capacities, but also a modernized, powerful, self-sufficient, and resilient energy system, supported by advanced technological infrastructure. In this regard, the two additional Memoranda of Understanding signed in Washington as part of the same package complement and reinforce the Crossroads of Peace initiative.

Complementing the infrastructure and security agenda, **the Energy Security Partnership MoU<sup>5</sup>** of 8 August 2025 supports diversification and modernization of Armenia’s energy sector, including renewable energy expansion, civil nuclear cooperation (including small modular reactors), grid modernization, protection of critical energy infrastructure, and enhanced energy cybersecurity. The MoU defines as core objectives contributing to Armenia’s energy diversification, security, resilience, and modernization; enhancing civilian nuclear cooperation; and recognizing the complementarity of the Participants’ efforts. It envisages collaboration to strengthen the resilience of Armenia’s energy system, including alignment of energy sector regulations and market standards with international best practices and support for Armenia’s transition to a low-carbon, competitive, and internationally integrated energy economy.

And finally, the third Memorandum of Understanding, signed on 8 August 2025 and dedicated **to the AI and Semiconductor Innovation Partnership**, was also adopted in furtherance of the Strategic Partnership Charter. It defines as core objectives fostering innovation, economic development, and technological advancement; investment in Armenia’s semiconductor ecosystem; support for resilient semiconductor supply chains; and recognition of the complementarity of bilateral efforts in this domain. It particularly envisages deepened collaboration on secure semiconductor supply chains, development of the semiconductor ecosystem and integrated circuit and electronics industries, and commercialization of artificial intelligence applications, aiming at creating the necessary conditions to elevate Armenia’s assessed status within the U.S. export control framework. This MoU extends cooperation into high-technology sectors, promoting development of Armenia’s semiconductor ecosystem, resilient supply chains, export control compliance, AI development, academic and research partnerships, workforce training, and investment in high-tech infrastructure.

Taken together, these agreements link transport connectivity with border security reform, energy resilience, export control enforcement, technological modernization, and institutional strengthening. The “Crossroads of Peace” thus emerges not merely as an infrastructure project, but as the central pillar of a broader strategic alignment aimed at enhancing Armenia’s sovereignty, economic integration, security capacity, and technological advancement within a structured U.S.–Armenian partnership framework.

## REGIONAL AND DOMESTIC TRIGGERS AND ACCELERATORS FOR THE CROSSROADS OF PEACE AND THE PEACE AGENDA: OUTSTANDING CHALLENGES ON THE GROUND

A comprehensive analysis across both the short-term (the past five years) and the longer thirty-year trajectory of Armenia’s statehood—viewed in the context of regional and broader geopolitical developments—makes it possible to identify the structural factors, immediate triggers, and accelerating dynamics that gave rise to the Peace Agenda, the Crossroads of Peace initiative, and TRIPP. Such a multidimensional perspective also clarifies the foundational pillars and strategic logic underpinning these initiatives.

### Armenia’s Post-War Disillusionments

Despite Armenia’s agreement—under considerable pressure amid the unfolding crisis—to the least favorable version of the so-called “Russian Plan” through the trilateral Armenia–Azerbaijan–Russia statement of 9 November 2020, intended to halt the 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and despite the statement’s formal provisions for maintaining the ceasefire, addressing humanitarian consequences, securing the remaining areas of Nagorno-Karabakh, and unblocking regional communication routes to end Armenia’s isolation, Yerevan’s expectations were ultimately unmet in all respects.

In particular, under that trilateral statement, Armenia, in accordance with the established timetable, handed over to Azerbaijan not only the seven districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh, but also left under its control the Hadrut and Shushi districts, which formed part of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and had been captured by Azerbaijan during the 44-day war. In parallel with the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the aforementioned districts and from Nagorno-Karabakh, a peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation was deployed along the “line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin Corridor for a period of five years”, consisting of 1,960 military personnel armed with small arms, 90 armored personnel carriers, and 380 units of automotive and special equipment, with a contractual possibility of extending the deployment upon the expiry of that term.

By Point 6 of the Statement, a “Lachin Corridor, five kilometers wide, bypassing the city of Shushi and under the control of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, was established to ensure the connection between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia”, while a plan for the construction of a “new route of the corridor was to be agreed between the parties within the next three years, with the subsequent redeployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent for the purpose of its protection”. Under that same point of the Statement, Azerbaijan undertook to “guarantee the security of the free movement of citizens (civilians), vehicles, and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions”.

A separate provision of the statement concerned “the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and the adjacent districts under the supervision of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees”. Armenia and Azerbaijan also undertook, through a separate clause, to “carry out the exchange of prisoners of war, hostages, and other detained persons, as well as the bodies of the deceased”.

<sup>5</sup> *Memoranda of Understanding signed between the Republic of Armenia and the United States, 08.08.2025*

Finally, pursuant to Point 9 of the Statement, “all economic and transport links in the region were to be unblocked”, within which context Armenia was to “guarantee the security of transport communication between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, with the aim of organizing the unobstructed movement of citizens, vehicles, and cargo in both directions”, over which “control was to be exercised by the border service bodies of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation”. The same point further provided that, “by agreement between the Parties, the construction of new transport communications connecting the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic with the western regions of Azerbaijan was to be ensured”.

The author and guarantor of this new security architecture in the Karabakh conflict zone was Russia, which since 2014 had been seeking ways to persuade, and, where necessary, compel, international and regional partners, and first and foremost the parties to the conflict, to agree to this plan. The 44-day war and the deadlock between the parties ultimately became the means for its implementation.

By and large, Armenia's expectations did not materialize, neither in terms of eliminating the risk of large-scale war after enduring such calamities, nor in terms of Russian guarantees of the security of Artsakh / Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia, nor, most emphatically, in terms of overcoming the blockade imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey.

## The Imminent Risk of Large-Scale Conflict and Russia's Role

Following the 9 November 2020 trilateral Armenia–Azerbaijan–Russia statement, Azerbaijan continued to press new territorial claims against Armenia and reinterpret its obligations. In particular, Baku began to frame Point 9 of the statement as requiring Armenia to provide a “Zangezur Corridor” connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhijevan. To address disputes over “communication issues” and implement the unblocking provisions of the statement, a second trilateral statement was signed on 11 January 2021<sup>6</sup>, establishing a commission with the deputy prime ministers of the three countries.

Baku also repeatedly raised demands for the unilateral return of so-called “Azerbaijani enclaves” formed during the Soviet period on the territory of Soviet Armenia on hitherto unclear legal grounds, as well as of “occupied villages” in Tavush Province—claims that had appeared in the preliminary version of the 9 November statement but were removed from the draft after Yerevan's refusal to sign it in that form<sup>7</sup>.

Azerbaijani public discourse, driven by government circles, increasingly invoked “historical concepts” such as “Western Azerbaijan,” “Azerbaijani Zangezur,” and “Azerbaijani Yerevan Khanate,” accompanied by widely circulated maps. Moreover, through the Shushi Declaration<sup>8</sup>, signed by the Presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan on 15 June 2021, the concept of the “Zangezur Corridor” was formally incorporated into the bilateral interstate agenda. The declaration also envisaged the construction of the Nakhijevan–Kars railway and emphasized the development of East–West transport corridors to enhance regional transit competitiveness. Ankara and Baku further committed to coordinated action in international and regional organizations such as the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as deepening bilateral cooperation and mutual support, including the development of transit and transport infrastructure across the Azerbaijani–Turkish segments of international corridors.

Weakened by the war, Armenia faced renewed security shocks on 12 May 2021, when Azerbaijani forces penetrated border areas from central-eastern Armenia down to the south, coinciding with a domestic political crisis and the announcement of snap parliamentary elections. Shock and anger in Armenia were compounded

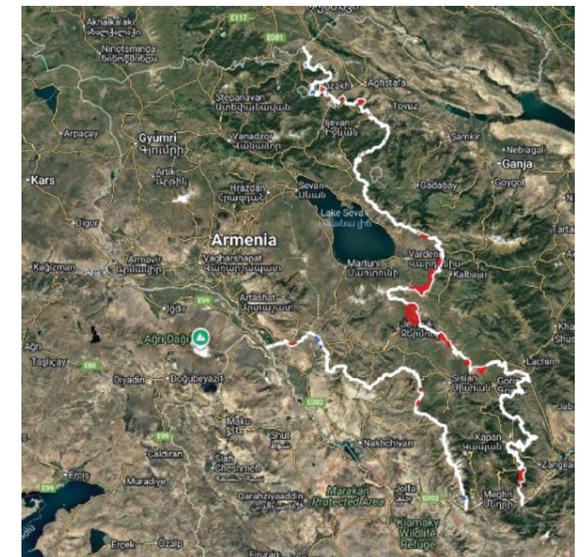
as the new Armenia–Azerbaijan border lines in these areas had been determined with Russian guidance and maps following the handover of Karvachar/Kelbajar, Qashatagh/Lachin, and Kovsakan/Zangelan districts. The following day, the Armenian Prime Minister instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Security Council to initiate the procedures outlined in the Regulation on Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)<sup>9</sup> Response to Crisis Situations and to begin consultations under Article 2 of the Collective Security Treaty, with the specific aim of coordinating the positions of CSTO member states and implementing measures to counter such threats.<sup>9</sup> On the same day, Armenian and Azerbaijani military officials met at the border for several hours of negotiations, joined by representatives of the Russian military deployed in Syunik Province. The talks, however, concluded without any publicly announced agreement or tangible outcome<sup>10</sup>.

In order to address the intensified border issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan, another trilateral statement<sup>11</sup> was signed on 26 November 2021 under the Russian mediation, aimed at the delimitation and demarcation of the interstate border. It envisaged the establishment of a bilateral governmental commission and Russian support in the form of advisory assistance and the provision of cartographic materials. Skillfully exploiting Armenia's vulnerabilities and at Yerevan's verbal request, Russia gradually deployed 17 military outposts along the entire Armenia–Azerbaijan border from north to south.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijani ceasefire violations persisted, including another major attack on 13 September 2022 along border segments with Russian outposts, occupying new territories and strategic elevations. In several cases, Russian positions not only failed to prevent these incursions but effectively provided “depth” for them. Similar patterns had been observed earlier, in February–March 2021, when Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh allowed Armenian-populated areas of the “zone of Russian responsibility”, including the village of Parukh and the strategic Karaglukh height, to fall to Azerbaijani forces. These developments underscore that the risk of large-scale conflict remains unresolved and potentially imminent, compounded by Russia's reluctance to restrain or prevent Azerbaijani aggression.

Both instances of forceful “border delimitation” or borderisation (the term internationally used to describe Russia's actions in “moving” borders in South Ossetia following the 2008 Russo–Georgian war) were interpreted by Azerbaijan as resulting from the “disputed nature of the border”, with Armenia's armed forces being “punished” for alleged provocations and attempts of revanchism. No less importantly, under Azerbaijan's interpretation of the trilateral arrangements, these actions were also justified by Armenia's alleged failure to fulfil its obligation to provide Azerbaijan with a land connection to Nakhichevan, namely, by “failing to provide an unobstructed corridor”.

In reality, Para 9 of the Trilateral Statement did not impose on Armenia an obligation equivalent to the Lachin/Berdzor Corridor, but rather required Armenia to provide unobstructed communication routes, i.e. roads, through its territory, with the involvement of Russian border guard services solely in matters of oversight. Azerbaijan's corridor-related parallels were unfounded from the very outset for another compelling reason: the trilateral statement, more specifically, its point 6, provided for only one corridor, and even then as a clearly defined zone of responsibility of the Russian peacekeeping



The occupation of the central-eastern and south-eastern sections of the Armenian–Azerbaijani border following the offensive operations carried out by the Azerbaijani armed forces in 2021–2022.

<sup>6</sup> Joint statement issued following meeting between Nikol Pashinyan, Vladimir Putin and Ilham Aliyev, 11.01.2021

<sup>7</sup> Testimonies of senior officials of the Government of Armenia closely involved in the negotiations, obtained during closed, off-the-record discussions without references.

<sup>8</sup> Shusha (Shushi-Arm.) Declaration on Allied Relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey, 15.06.2021

<sup>9</sup> Nikol Pashinyan: “Early completion of CSTO procedures is needed to prevent further escalation and protect the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia”, Official website of the PM of RA, 13.05.2021

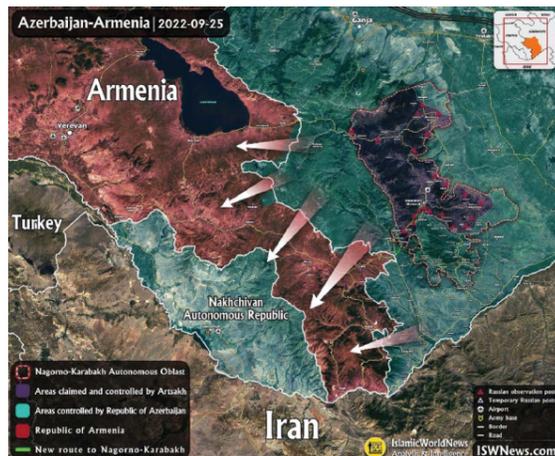
<sup>10</sup> Armenia Turns to Russian-Led CSTO Amid Border Standoff with Azerbaijan

<sup>11</sup> Armenian Prime Minister, Russian President, Azerbaijani President adopt joint statement, 26.11.2021

contingent, described in terms of its dimensions and location and placed under their control, whereas Point 9 stipulated Armenia's provision of unobstructed roads within the broader context of unblocking all regional communications, without establishing, for any part of Armenia's territory, a "foreign or Russian peacekeeping-controlled regime", without defining dimensions or geography, and without using the term "corridor".

Nevertheless, for years Azerbaijan demanded a corridor from Armenia and refused to make use of the three border crossing points and three routes proposed by Yerevan for its connection with Nakhichevan, an offer made by the Prime Minister of Armenia literally two days prior to Azerbaijan's second incursion.<sup>12</sup>

It is no coincidence that numerous analyses of Azerbaijan's incursions and occupations in 2021–2022. And particularly the second large-scale escalation of September 2022, highlighted that the primary targets were strategically significant Armenian heights, controlling and/or severing the only North–South highway of vital and strategic importance. Moreover, the main direction of the attack coincided with the narrowest section separating Armenia from Nakhichevan. Consequently, these developments led many analysts to conclude that that Azerbaijan's military strategy has been, and remains, aimed at establishing a land corridor and the secession of southern Armenia—specifically the Vayots Dzor and Syunik regions. This objective directly prompted the post-war development of the "historical Zangezur" and "Zangezur Corridor" discourses and concepts. Notably, Azerbaijan has sought to internationalize the latter concept through expert discourse and political rhetoric, framing it as an internationally recognized "transport corridor" or "economic corridor," whereas its actual aim has always been to normalize and familiarize this concept in the ears of policymakers and decision-makers around the world.



5 directions of Azerbaijan's September 2022 offensive and the map of the deployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno-Karabakh

Of course, the shuttle diplomacy exercised by Washington and Brussels, as well as the efforts and actions of the EU institutions and individual member states, not only during that period but also throughout the following perilous years, prevented the cyclic generation of large-scale war risks between Armenia and Azerbaijan (notably in the springs of 2023, 2024, and 2025). Yet both in Yerevan and in all Western capitals it was understood that the war was merely being postponed and prolonged. Accordingly, institutionalized, lasting peace in the region became imperative for Armenia, Europe, the United States, and other stakeholders, given the visible presence of more than one actor interested in resolving the situation by force, exploiting instability and unresolved issues.

A new large-scale war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Caucasus would have been catastrophic not only for Armenia's which had exposed military and strategic vulnerabilities, but also for the West. In February 2022, following Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Moscow, as well as the severing of all its diplomatic and transport communications (land, sea, and air), the West made decisions to reduce its dependence on Russia. This included seeking alternatives to the Russian energy carriers through the Caucasus and replacing transport routes through Russia with alternative corridors connecting to the markets in Central and Far Asia and the Middle East. This, in turn, elevated war-interested Azerbaijan's strategic significance as a link connecting Central Asia, while simultaneously making it a potential flashpoint<sup>13</sup>: On one hand, this constrained the EU and the United States from imposing stringent and corrective sanctions on Baku; on the other hand, it created an urgent imperative for them to restrain Azerbaijan to avoid triggering an explosive situation.

<sup>12</sup> Yerevan proposed unrealistic options to Baku for opening checkpoints at the border: Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responds to Pashinyan, Today, 17.10.2022

<sup>13</sup> Josep Borrell, Central Asia's growing importance globally and for the EU, 20.11.2022, Official website of the EU

## Russia is not a security guarantors, nor a honest broker of peace but a beneficiary of the conflict

The talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the principles of a peace treaty began in early spring 2021, just months after the end of the war, but unfolded under extremely challenging circumstances shaped by subsequent developments.

At Baku's insistence, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was excluded from the agenda and framed as an already settled internal matter of Azerbaijan. In the prevailing geopolitical context, Armenia lacked the leverage to oppose this position effectively on its own, while Russia overtly raised no objections. Moreover, despite numerous public statements supporting Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, Moscow, particularly through its proxies within Armenia's foreign and defense ministries and political forces, applied pressure on the Armenian authorities to refrain from removing the issue of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict from Armenia's foreign policy and public agenda and to avoid recognizing Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and the Armenia–Azerbaijan border without resolving that issue comprehensively. These disagreements led to the replacement of two Armenian foreign ministers by mid-2021.

A striking manifestation of this influence was seen immediately after the 2020 War, with the opposition movements generated by former presidents and their affiliated political forces in Armenia: the Homeland Salvation Movement (2020–2022), the General Staff mutiny in spring 2021, and in spring 2024 the "Sacred/Holy Movement" in Tavush, formed to prevent border delimitation and led by clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church. All of these movements enjoyed Kremlin support and were serviced propagandistically and, in some cases, financially both from Russia and by pro-Russian circles and media in Armenia. The Armenian authorities drew conclusions from this. Unfailingly, all these movements aimed to overthrow the government through a new revolution or coup, to pursue the Artsakh issue in Armenia's foreign policy, to align on security matters primarily with Russia, to openly prevent the delimitation and demarcation of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border in line with the Alma-Ata Declaration, and to freeze not only the conflict in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also in the newly-emerged Armenia-Azerbaijan border zones.

In February 2022, Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the ensuing deep confrontation between the West (the United States and the EU) and Russia, coupled with the suspension of cooperation in all formats and organizations, directly affected the work of EU, US, French, and Russian envoys appointed to facilitate the settlement of Armenia–Azerbaijan relations. Until then, the specific US–France–Russia trio, albeit with weakened positions and repeatedly accused by Baku for "decades of inaction," formally operated cooperatively within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship. Despite disagreements in their conceptions of resolving the remaining issues of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the co-chairing envoys kept working within their international mandate on the separate Stepanakert–Baku negotiation agenda, distinct from the Yerevan–Baku format.

After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, all of this effectively turned into separate mediation efforts, with Russia diplomatically isolated. By the summer of 2022, Moscow no longer concealed its anger and hostile attitude toward its international and mediating isolation and the "non-cooperative" Western mediators. The Kremlin was particularly irritated by the series of Armenia–Azerbaijan summits mediated by Charles Michel, President of the European Council, which Washington closely monitored and supported in hypersynchrony. These summits had begun at the end of 2021 and addressed the Armenia–Azerbaijan Peace Agreement, the remaining issues of the Karabakh conflict, the elimination of its underlying causes, as well as the principles for unblocking regional transport routes, i.e. all issues that had caused severe disputes between the parties.

By the end of the summer of 2022, statements issued in the name of Charles Michel highlighted progress in agreeing on the mutual recognition of territorial integrity and sovereignty and on the principles of border inviolability in preparation for the Peace Agreement. Regarding the unblocking of regional transport routes, a joint position had been formulated, emphasizing implementation based on the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, jurisdiction, and reciprocity. Such arrangements directly threatened Russia's long-term plans and strategic envisioning.

In response, Moscow in its turn decided to sideline the rivals. In July 2022, Russia's FSB border service formally approached the Armenian authorities to assist, pursuant to Point 9 of the 9 November 2020 trilateral statement, with the creation of a "restricted zone" along the Meghri–Nrnadzor section of the Armenian-Iranian border, connecting Nakhijevan with Azerbaijan. The FSB even unilaterally initiated installing seven border checkpoints in the area. Following a written response from Yerevan requesting further clarification on the relationship between these actions and Point 9, the Russian side asked for its letter to be returned and subsequently resent the same letter, but this time without reference to the 9 November trilateral statement. Moscow and Baku interpreted Yerevan's conduct and its insistence on removing the seven checkpoints as a refusal to fulfil its obligations.<sup>14</sup>

This was immediately followed, in early August 2022, by another violation of the 9 November 2020 trilateral statement by Azerbaijan: the unilateral early decision on a new route bypassing the city of Shushi in the Lachin/Berdzor corridor, taken without consultation with the Armenian side,<sup>15</sup> and executed with the tacit acquiescence of Russia and its peacekeeping forces—the supposed guarantors of the trilateral agreements.

In September 2022, Russian Foreign Minister's Special Representative on normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations Igor Khovayev presented to Yerevan and Baku the Kremlin's version of the principles of the Peace Agreement<sup>16</sup>, proposing, due to insurmountable differences between the parties, that the status of Nagorno-Karabakh be left undefined and that Russian peacekeepers remain deployed in the region for up to 20 years. Although official Yerevan did not raise a fundamental objection to the proposal, Baku disagreed. Nevertheless, Moscow was highly irritated that Armenia continued to maintain hope and engage with the West, particularly the EU, including participation in the Armenia–Azerbaijan summit convened by the President of the European Council at the end of August 2022.

The second Azerbaijani aggression on 13 September 2022 prompted Armenia to request a session at the UN Security Council to discuss the situation<sup>17</sup>. While Armenia submitted its second official request to the CSTO triggering Article 4 of the treaty<sup>18</sup>, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan simultaneously called for the deployment of international observers in Armenian regions occupied by Azerbaijan<sup>19</sup>. The unfolding situation also prompted a series of high-level diplomatic engagements, including meetings between representatives<sup>20</sup> of the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders and their foreign ministers<sup>21</sup> in Washington, as well as the Prague summit of 6 October 2022, held with the participation of the President of the European Council and the President of France.

Yerevan expected these meetings and formats to produce practical solutions and fundamental agreements that would address the consequences of its territory's occupation, prevent a recurrence of aggression, and exclude the continuation of the previous period's dangerous demands and developments.

However, in response to Armenia's two formal appeals, neither the CSTO nor Russia formally recognized the situation as aggression against a member state, nor did they fulfill their bilateral or multilateral defense obligations. Instead, they proposed that Yerevan consent to the deployment of CSTO "peacekeeping forces" or refer the matter to the bilateral delimitation and demarcation commission—an inherently lengthy and complex process. Furthermore, within the framework of that commission, Russia failed to uphold its commitment

<sup>14</sup> Based on testimonies from a senior official of the Government of Armenia and experts during closed, off-the-record discussions without references, July 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Point 6 of the trilateral statement stipulated: "By agreement of the Parties, within the next three years a plan shall be determined for the construction of a new route through the Lachin Corridor ensuring the connection between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, with the subsequent redeployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent for the purpose of protecting that route." Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Russian Federation, 09.10.2020 Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Russian Federation, 09.10.2020

<sup>16</sup> Спецпредставитель МИД РФ Игорь Ховаев посетит в ближайшее время Ереван. News.am, 08.09.2022, Moscow has sent Khovayev's plan, but Pashinyan and Aliyev are moving with the Brussels package. 168.am, 06.10.2022

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, with a request to convene an emergency meeting of the Security Council, 13.09.2022

<sup>18</sup> Armenia asked CSTO for military support to restore territorial integrity amid Azeri attack – PM, Armenpress, 14.09.2022

<sup>19</sup> Pashinyan calls for deployment of international observers to Armenian regions affected by Azerbaijani invasion, Arka, 29.09.2022

<sup>20</sup> Arman Grigoryan, Hikmet Hajiyev Meet at White House, Hetq, 29.09.2022

<sup>21</sup> The meeting of the Foreign Minister of Armenia, the US Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, Official website of the RA MFA, 07.11.2022

to provide the necessary cartographic materials and advisory support. Discouraged by all these, Yerevan subsequently initiated wider discussions on freezing its membership in the CSTO or even exiting from it.

Contrary to Russia, the roles of the United States and the European Union proved particularly significant in deterring further escalation in the fall of 2022. Clear and unambiguous support for Armenia was voiced at the UN Security Council by representatives of Armenia's western partners and their allies, while the Russian envoy adopted a markedly cautious and diplomatically evasive posture.<sup>22</sup> All of this further reinforced Yerevan's conclusions regarding Moscow's role as a disingenuous mediator, its lack of genuine alliance with Armenia, and its status as a beneficiary in the Armenia–Azerbaijan border conflict.

As Moscow grew increasingly irritated by Yerevan's efforts to raise these issues at the UN Security Council and to seek international security guarantees for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in Western capitals and mediation formats, a parallel dynamic was unfolding. The apparent convergence of Russian–Azerbaijani positions on the so-called "Zangezur Corridor," Russia's acquiescence to unilateral Azerbaijani actions in the Lachin Corridor in violation of trilateral arrangements, and the absence of any meaningful response or consequences from Russia and the CSTO following Azerbaijani attacks on Armenia's border areas collectively accelerated Armenia's pivot toward Western platforms.

At the quadrilateral meeting in Prague on 6 October 2022, the parties agreed on fundamental principles for the Peace Agreement and the resolution of border disputes: recognition of each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty under the Alma-Ata Declaration, and the deployment of EU civilian observers along the Armenia–Azerbaijan border<sup>23</sup>. In the first phase of discussions, the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders agreed to the deployment of the monitoring mission along the border on both sides; however, in the final phase, Baku "changed" its position regarding the placement of observers on its territory, agreeing only to "cooperate" insofar as the mission could safely operate in Armenia's border areas<sup>24</sup>. As a result, the EU Monitoring Mission was deployed solely on the Armenian territory, later becoming a regular target of criticism from Moscow and Baku. Moreover, the Russian military posts stationed in Syunik obstructed access to the border zone and impeded the conduct of the observers' monitoring missions.

In an effort to strike a blow against European rival mediation and to reclaim the initiative, Russia convened yet another trilateral summit in Sochi on 31 October 2022. On the eve of the meeting, the Prime Minister of Armenia reaffirmed his consent to the proposal presented by the Russian envoy earlier, namely, deferring the determination of Nagorno-Karabakh's status and extending the mandate of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, on the condition that Russia did not withdraw the proposal and succeed in securing Azerbaijan's agreement as well. In Sochi, Armenia became convinced that Russia was not insisting on either of its proposals, and a new trilateral statement was signed, largely replicating the principles agreed in Prague.<sup>25</sup>

In December 2022, in violation of Point 6 of the 9 November, 2020 Statement, Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin/Berdzor corridor in Artsakh, while Russian peacekeepers displayed inaction and acquiescence. This prompted Yerevan to refrain from attending the year-end meeting of the foreign ministers of Armenia, Russia, and Azerbaijan in Moscow, which had been convened to launch work on the Peace Agreement based on the Sochi Statement and to discuss the "implementation" of the trilateral arrangements. The central and most contentious issue on the agenda was once again the so-called "corridor," in a context where, during the summer, Yerevan had rejected the alleged "obligation" to provide a "Meghri Corridor," while simultaneously demanding that Azerbaijan and Russia reopen the Lachin corridor. Angered by Armenia's boycott, Moscow sharply criticized Yerevan for seeking international security guarantees for the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace agreement in Brussels, Washington, other capitals, and international organizations<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Gaidz Minassian, *The Security Council and the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict: A Warning or a Green Light for Baku?*, EVN Report, 20.09.2022

<sup>23</sup> Statement following quadrilateral meeting between President Aliyev, Prime Minister Pashinyan, President Macron and President Michel, 6 October 2022, Official website of the European council

<sup>24</sup> Based on testimonies from closed, off-the-record discussions involving EU civilian observers, diplomats and experts, April 2023 and May 2023.

<sup>25</sup> *The Prime Minister of Armenia, the Presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan adopt a statement based on the Sochi meeting*, 31.10.2022

<sup>26</sup> *Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В.Лаврова в ходе совместной пресс-конференции с Министром иностранных дел Азербайджанской Республики Д.А.Байрамовым по итогам переговоров*, Москва, 23 декабря 2022 года, Official website of the MFA of the Russian Federation

Concerned with these competing and challenging trends Armenia opted to continue negotiations on the Peace Agreement with Azerbaijan in a bilateral format, without mediators. Yerevan believed that this approach would at least reduce the impact of the sharp confrontation between the European and Russian mediation efforts on both the negotiation process and the rapidly escalating crisis in Artsakh and the Lachin Corridor.

The blockade of Artsakh and the looming risk of a renewed attack compelled Yerevan to insist on incorporating into the draft agreement with Baku provisions that would, at least to some extent, restrain Azerbaijan's threat of ethnic cleansing of the region's Armenian population. The first group of such provisions concerned the peaceful settlement of disputes in international organizations and courts, primarily the claims filed by Armenia against Azerbaijan. Such claims were already submitted by Yerevan to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2021<sup>27</sup> and to the European Court on Human Rights (ECHR) in 2022 on the grounds of discrimination, accusing Azerbaijan of decades of rights abuses against Armenian citizens and ethnic Armenians—including events that unfolded during the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Amid the crisis in the Lachin Corridor, in December, 2022 Armenia submitted requests to the ICJ and the ECHR<sup>28</sup> for the indication of provisional measures in response to the corridor's closure, which shortly thereafter led to the issuance of an urgent interim order against Azerbaijan by the two courts<sup>29</sup>.

In addition, following the internal formal discussions initiated at the end of 2022, Armenia began in 2023 the process of ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which also created a tangible prospect of filing cases against Azerbaijan before that court, both in relation to the occupation of the Armenian border areas and the crimes committed during those incursions, and in the event of a possible attack against Artsakh. This decision by Armenia angered Moscow and could not but cause concern in Azerbaijan. The domestic process of ratification of the Statute reached its logical conclusion on November 17, 2023, and Armenia joined that court, too<sup>30</sup>.

Finally, the OSCE Minsk Group continued to exist formally, with its co-chairmanship, mandate, and the conflict-resolution issues defined over decades within that framework (territories, the districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh, refugees, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenia–Nagorno-Karabakh corridor, international security guarantees for Nagorno-Karabakh, post-war recovery, and a donor conference), as well as the three agreed principles (territorial integrity, the right to self-determination and equality of nations, and the non-use or threat of use of force). During this period, the American and French co-chairs, as well as Brussels and Washington, repeatedly spoke of resolving the remaining issues of the conflict, which further irritated Baku.

Another point of contention in the draft Peace Agreement negotiated between Yerevan and Baku concerned the presence of third-party forces along the borders of the two states. The Russian military outposts deployed at 17 locations along Armenia's border had provided favorable operational conditions for the Azerbaijani incursions; therefore, Baku did not regard them nor the Russian contingent stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh as problematic. Azerbaijan's demand was directed primarily at the withdrawal of the deployed EU's civilian monitoring mission, the decision on which was taken at the Prague Meeting and implemented from February, 2023<sup>31</sup>, despite the fact that the mission did not constitute military or armed forces.

The last group of disputed provisions concerned the unblocking of regional transport links, where Baku relied on its interpretation of Point 9 of the 9 November 2020 Statement regarding "unimpeded communication with Nakhichevan," in contradiction to the positions it had expressed or accepted at the Brussels and Washington platforms.

<sup>27</sup> *Armenia Challenges Azerbaijan at International Court Of Justice*, RFE/RL, 16.09.2021, *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan)*, official website of ICJ

<sup>28</sup> *Request by the Republic of Armenia for the indication of provisional measures*, official website of ICJ, 27.12.2022

<sup>29</sup> *ICJ orders Azerbaijan to unblock Lachin Corridor*, OC-Media, 23.02.2023, *ECHR Indicates Interim Measures in Arm v. Azer re: Lachin Corridor*, *The American Society of International Law*, 03.01.2023

<sup>30</sup> *Armenia joins the ICC Rome Statute*, Official website of ICC, 17.11.2023

<sup>31</sup> *EU Mission in Armenia to increase its presence on the ground*, Official website of the European Union

These disagreements over the text of the agreement persisted for a prolonged period; even after Azerbaijan's attack on Artsakh on 19 September 2023 and the subsequent cleansing of the region from the ethnic Armenian population, the above-mentioned mechanisms did not lose their vital importance for Yerevan. Moreover, the EU Monitoring Mission had had a tangible impact, at least in ensuring stability and security in Armenia's border areas. For Armenia, that mission was also perceived as part of the process and toolkit for increasing international legal and political pressure on Azerbaijan to reopen the Lachin/Berdzor corridor<sup>32</sup>. In addition, there remained faint hopes of internationalizing the Russian peacekeeping mandate, which had failed in Nagorno-Karabakh and in the Lachin corridor, or supplementing or replacing it with a European one, as a result of which the highly volatile sections of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border would be secured on both sides by European or international observers (as noted earlier, at the initial stage of the Prague meeting Azerbaijan had given preliminary consent to their deployment on its own territory as well).

Nevertheless, the approximately ten-month blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh was "resolved" on 19 September 2023 by a new Azerbaijani attack on Artsakh. Amid reports of Moscow's prior awareness of the impending Azerbaijani assault, and under conditions of the Russian peacekeepers' silent observation and inaction throughout the Azerbaijani Armed Forces' encircling attack and artillery bombardment of Nagorno-Karabakh, approximately 100,000 ethnic Armenians—left without any credible physical security guarantees in the "zone of Russian responsibility under the 9 November Trilateral Statement"—were forcibly displaced to Armenia. Moreover, under the mediation of the Russian peacekeeping command, an "agreement" was negotiated and signed between the authorities in Stepanakert and Azerbaijan, envisaging the dissolution of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh).

Notably, the initial draft of the document included a provision on the "withdrawal of the Armed Forces of Armenia from the Nagorno Karabakh." However, following the Armenian Prime Minister's immediate public rejection—stating that Armenia had no armed forces in Nagorno-Karabakh and deeming the inclusion of such a provision unacceptable—the wording was removed from the text. At the same time, Pashinyan alluded to the possibility that, in the context of the Azerbaijani attack, certain actors had calculated that Armenia would be drawn into a large-scale war in order to save the Armenians of Artsakh, with all the ensuing consequences—namely, the imposition of previously rejected concessions (including the so-called "Zangezur Corridor"), a severe capitulation, and potentially even the loss of Armenia's independence and sovereignty. According to him, if this scenario failed, a "Plan B" envisaged using the displaced Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh to destabilize Armenia and overthrow the authorities in Yerevan<sup>33</sup>. Behind these transparent allusions by the Prime Minister stood not only Baku, but also Moscow.

Azerbaijan's second military offensive in the region, coupled with its aim of complete ethnic cleansing, created an entirely new set of challenges and a profoundly changed security environment for Armenia. Both the Russian and European platforms of the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace negotiations, progressing in parallel and at almost the same pace, soon entered a deadlock in the second half of 2023. The European mediation concluded in the Autumn of 2023 in Granada, with a meeting between the EU leadership, the Franco-German tandem, and the Armenian Prime Minister, followed by the adoption of a joint statement<sup>34</sup>. Although the document reiterated principles previously agreed with both the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia, the Azerbaijani President refused to attend the meeting, citing what he described as the "unacceptable unilateral assessments and statements" of the French President and Foreign Minister and declined to sign the statement.

Similarly, the Russian-led format, in direct competition with the European approach, faced a crisis as a result of Armenia's explicit and public rejection. Several months after the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, and more than a year ahead of the envisaged five-year mandate, the Russian peacekeeping forces also withdrew from the region. This left the status of the four statements signed since

<sup>32</sup> *Lachin Corridor Must Be Reopened for Humanitarian Aid*, *Security Council Hears, as Speakers Urge Armenia, Azerbaijan to Normalize Relations*, UNSC, 16.08.2023

<sup>33</sup> *Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addresses the nation*, Official website of the PM of RA, 19.09.2023

<sup>34</sup> *Based on the results of the meeting between Nikol Pashinyan, Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz and Charles Michel, a joint statement was adopted*, Official website of the PM of RA, 19.09.2023

2020 unresolved, despite official Moscow's assertion that none of the parties had withdrawn from them and that three of those statements, as well as Point 9 of the 9 November 2020 statement, remain in force.

In further negotiations with Baku, Yerevan was compelled to proceed exclusively through a bilateral format, adapting to the new realities and driven by the imperative to prevent a renewed large-scale war. In doing so, Armenia gradually transformed its previous disagreements over the Peace Treaty.

Emboldened by its success in Nagorno-Karabakh, at the beginning of 2024 Azerbaijan, through documents exchanged between the intergovernmental delimitation and demarcation commissions, refused to recognize its occupation of the near-border areas of Armenian settlements from north to south, the list of which had been submitted by Yerevan. Through its presented counter-list, Baku demanded the immediate "de-occupation" of four formerly Azerbaijani-inhabited villages adjacent to Armenia's Tavush Province, which had been abandoned during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in the 1990s and had remained in an interposition zone.

The Armenian authorities interpreted this ultimatum from Baku as a strategy aimed at seeking a casus belli, whereby the refusal to it would grant Azerbaijan a "legitimate" right to "de-occupy" them by force and to ignite the entire Armenia-Azerbaijan border, with all the attendant consequences: in Armenia's north-eastern segment across the whole of Tavush Province, where Azerbaijan demanded the two Soviet-era Azerbaijani enclaves (near the settlements of Voskepar and Azatamut); in the eastern segment, Gegharkunik Province, where Azerbaijan regarded the entire eastern shoreline of Lake Sevan as "historical Azerbaijan and Goycha"; and in the southern segment, the entirety of Vayots Dzor (where the third Soviet-era Azerbaijani enclave is located) and Syunik Province, which Azerbaijan considered "historical Azerbaijani Zangezur" allegedly taken from it during the Soviet period. In all these areas, as a result of the occupations of 2021–2022, Azerbaijan had secured highly advantageous positions on strategic elevations within the proper Armenian territory.

Through the efforts of Armenia and the international community, this explosive situation was defused by means of a pilot delimitation between four villages of Armenia's Tavush Province and four villages of Azerbaijan's Gazakh District<sup>35</sup>. Using the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration and the relevant Soviet maps as a basis was, at a minimum, an outcome of the corresponding arrangements reached at the summit of the leaders of the EU, France, Armenia and Azerbaijan held in Prague on October 6, 2022. Subsequently, Armenia and Azerbaijan also enshrined this approach in the "Regulation on Joint Activity of the Commission on Delimitation and Border Security of the State Border between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State Commission on Delimitation of the State Border between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia"<sup>36</sup>, which, as the first interstate agreement between two states, were ratified in both countries through domestic legal procedures. From the pilot delimitation under the approved Regulations, one of the key agreed provisions was the withdrawal of third-party forces deployed in the area following the completion of delimitation, a requirement that first applied to the Russian military outposts. The delimitation in Tavush was followed by the dismantling of those outposts both there and along the entire border line, with all 17 military outposts removed by the beginning of 2025.

In late summer 2024, Azerbaijan announced that the provisions relating to the unblocking of regional transport links would be removed from the Peace Agreement. This approach by Baku was consonant with the statements emanating from Moscow, according to which, regardless of developments unfolded in Nagorno Karabakh region, Point 9 of the 9 November Statement and the format for unblocking transport links remained in force, thereby sustaining Baku's hopes of obtaining the "Zangezur Corridor" within the framework of Russian-Azerbaijani mutual understanding and interpretation. Significant changes in Azerbaijan's negotiating behavior were observed only after the deterioration of its relations with Russia, triggered by the downing of an Azerbaijani civilian aircraft over Chechnya by Russian air defense forces<sup>37</sup>.

The disagreements over the other two groups of the provisions persisted until the beginning of 2025, when Yerevan announced that an agreement on those issues had been reached with Azerbaijan.

<sup>35</sup> Press release on the outcome of the 8th meeting of the State Commissions on the delimitation of the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Official website of the RA MFA, 19.04.2024

<sup>36</sup> Armenia and Azerbaijan sign regulation on joint activity of delimitation commissions, Armenpress, 30.08.2024 The text of the Regulation on the Official website of the MFA of the RA

<sup>37</sup> Exclusive: Preliminary investigation confirms Russian missile caused Azerbaijan Airlines crash, Euronews, 26.12.2024

## The Unblocking of Armenia in the Russia-Armenia-Azerbaijan Format Is Either Impossible or Dangerous for Armenia

For Armenia, the negotiations conducted within the framework of the trilateral intergovernmental commission established by the Russia-Azerbaijan-Armenia statement of 11 January 2021<sup>38</sup> on the unblocking of regional transport communications proved no less disappointing. These negotiations were likewise profoundly affected by the dramatic developments outlined above and by the positions adopted by Azerbaijan and Russia.

At the very first meetings of the trilateral intergovernmental commission, a decision was adopted to examine and assess, based on feasibility and cost, the possibility of unblocking all existing and prospective transport routes and roads. Armenia naïvely believed that, based on objective assessments by all three parties, the most feasible option would be the reactivation of already existing railway lines. Specifically, at the first stage, the launch of the Russia (Makhachkala) – Azerbaijan (Baku) – Georgia (Tbilisi) – Armenia (Yerevan) railway, which would require neither time nor financial expenditure; at the second stage, the operation of the Armenia (Yerevan) – Nakhijevan – Iran (Julfa) railway, through the restoration and renovation of the Yeraskh-Sadarak border railway section, which would require relatively limited time and resources; third, the activation of the railway from Armenia through Azerbaijan to Russia, involving the restoration and repair of the cross-border section of the Ijevan-Gazakh line and the landslide-damaged sections of the Dilijan-Ijevan line, as well as the reconstruction of other key segments of the internal network; and finally, the construction of the Nrnadzor-Meghri – Minjevan/Mijnavan - Horadiz railway section, which was the most time-consuming and costly option not only for Armenia, but also for Azerbaijan.

However, to Armenia's disappointment, having assumed that Russia's interests within the North-South transport corridor would significantly incentivize it to implement the unblocking scheme according to the order determined by feasibility assessments, by the second half of 2022 Armenia had already become convinced that Moscow's and Baku's "understandings" regarding the so-called "Zangezur Corridor" were quite close, if not identical: namely, "first the corridor, and only then unblocking".

Consequently, Armenia was left with no option but to look for and identify other interested stakeholders in the unblocking of regional transport routes based on the principles agreed in Western capitals, and to put forward a broader and more inclusive proposal to attract and interests them.

This was particularly the case given that, in the summer of 2024, Azerbaijan agreed to remove from the draft Peace Treaty those provisions relating to unblocking which had become the subject of irreconcilable disagreements. Despite the withdrawal of its peacekeeping contingent from Nagorno-Karabakh and its gross

<sup>38</sup> Joint statement issued following meeting between Nikol Pashinyan, Vladimir Putin and Ilham Aliyev, 11.01.2021

MAP 1  
South Caucasus Transport Routes



Photo: The railway network in the caucasus



The Nakhijevan (Azerbaijan) and Syunik (Armenia) section of the Yerevan-Baku railway: from Norashen to Minjevan/Mijnavan stations

violations of all provisions of the 2020 trilateral statement, Russia has nevertheless not considered its strategy regarding unblocking to be “defunct”. On the contrary, it continues to insist that Point 9 of the 9 November 2020 Trilateral Statement remains in force, and that the trilateral statement of 11 January 2021 on unblocking and the corresponding commission remain operational.

## THE CROSSROADS OF PEACE: AN AMBITIOUS PROGRAM FOR INTEGRATION INTO THE “WEST-EAST” AND “NORTH-SOUTH” TRANSPORT ROUTES

Armenia’s proclaimed “Peace Agenda” and the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative were advanced precisely in order to overcome these above-listed threats and challenges. It is, in itself, a telling fact that the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative was unveiled immediately after the dramatic developments of September 2023, following the forceful deportation of Armenians from Artsakh.

The two words used in the naming of the initiatives conveyed a clear message to neighboring states in the region and to all actors beyond it, namely: (1) Armenia has adopted an irreversible peace agenda; Armenia does not seek war but, on the contrary, is interested in normalizing relations with its two neighbors, opening borders, establishing interdependencies with them and others, and excluding the possibility of any future conflict; and (2) Armenia wishes and/or aspires to integrate into regional projects and transport connectivity corridors, and to become part of international trade and transit networks. The slogan proclaimed for the Crossroads of Peace initiative was “Armenia is Ready”.

This new paradigm replaces the “conflict deadlock” that defined Armenia’s domestic and foreign policy for decades. Formulated in 1998 by the second President and the Foreign Minister, that earlier concept claimed Armenia could thrive for a century despite being blockaded.

However, the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the issue of the Armenian Genocide—and the resulting blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey—eventually became tools for external actors, specifically **Russia**. Moscow used these tensions to manage its own relations with Ankara and Baku, while simultaneously leveraging Armenia as a proxy and deepening Yerevan’s dependence. This dynamic, which obstructed Armenia’s democratic and economic development, reached such a degree that from the late 2000s onwards these levers were openly applied against Yerevan in order to extract security-related and foreign policy decisions from Armenia.

Therefore, through the Peace Agenda and the Crossroads of Peace initiatives, Armenia proclaimed the adoption of a new paradigm and new principles in its domestic and foreign policies, namely: **democracy and resilience, diversification, and balancing**.

The first of these is of vital importance not only for the country’s internal development and the ensuring of security, but also for securing the engagement of influential actors of the democratic world, namely the European Union and the United States. The second principle presupposes the implementation of a multi-vector foreign policy, which serves not only to compensate for missing vital resources, but also as a mean of creating space for the involvement of other actors in the country’s modernization. Finally, the third principle envisages mechanisms to render emerging interdependencies fair and inclusive, as well as to balance competing initiatives.

Armenia’s “Crossroads of Peace” initiative is based both on the country’s geographical location as a strategic asset and on existing or planned infrastructure, including the reconstruction and reactivation of previously operational networks as an objective reality. No less importantly, it is also grounded in new geopolitical and geoeconomic realities that have emerged across the wider region, in particular as a result of the war that erupted in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone in the 1990s and especially its most recent outcomes, and more broadly as a consequence of the intensified confrontation between the West, i.e. the United States and the European Union, and Russia in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Through the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative, the Government of the Republic of Armenia considered that, by virtue of its geographical position, Armenia may become part of the **Russia’s “North–South” corridor, New Delhi’s India–Europe project, China’s Belt and Road Initiative; Europe–Caucasus–Asia transport corridor or the “Middle Corridor”;** supported and preferred by the EU and the United States; and, finally, **Iran’s Persian Gulf–Black Sea transport project**. Undoubtedly, the sharp competition among these projects, the reservations of key stakeholders regarding them or their specific segments, and the unresolved relations among major power centers at first glance render the intersection of all these routes on Armenia’s territory problematic, and some of them even unpromising. However, upon deeper examination, their synchronization and alignment within the Armenian segment create prospects for calibrating competing projects, ensuring rules-based inclusiveness and engagement, promoting mutual integration, and transforming the dynamics of tensions in the region.

The full implementation of all this requires a more comprehensive roadmap that would connect and unblock not only the East–West routes among the countries of the South Caucasus, but would also make it possible to implement North–South–East–West connectivity through the territory of Armenia.

### The principles of the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative were enshrined in four core principles:

**Principle No. 1:** All infrastructure, including roads, railways, air routes, pipelines, cables, and power transmission lines, shall operate under the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the states through whose territory they pass.

**Principle No. 2:** Each state shall exercise border and customs control within its own territory through its state institutions, and shall also ensure the security of the infrastructure, including the safe passage of goods, vehicles, and persons through it. For this purpose, a specialized unit has even been established within Armenia’s law-enforcement system, whose function will be to ensure the security of international communications passing through Armenia, as well as the movement of goods, vehicles, and persons along them, naturally in cooperation with the Patrol Police.

**Principle No. 3:** The aforementioned infrastructure may be used for both international and domestic transportations.

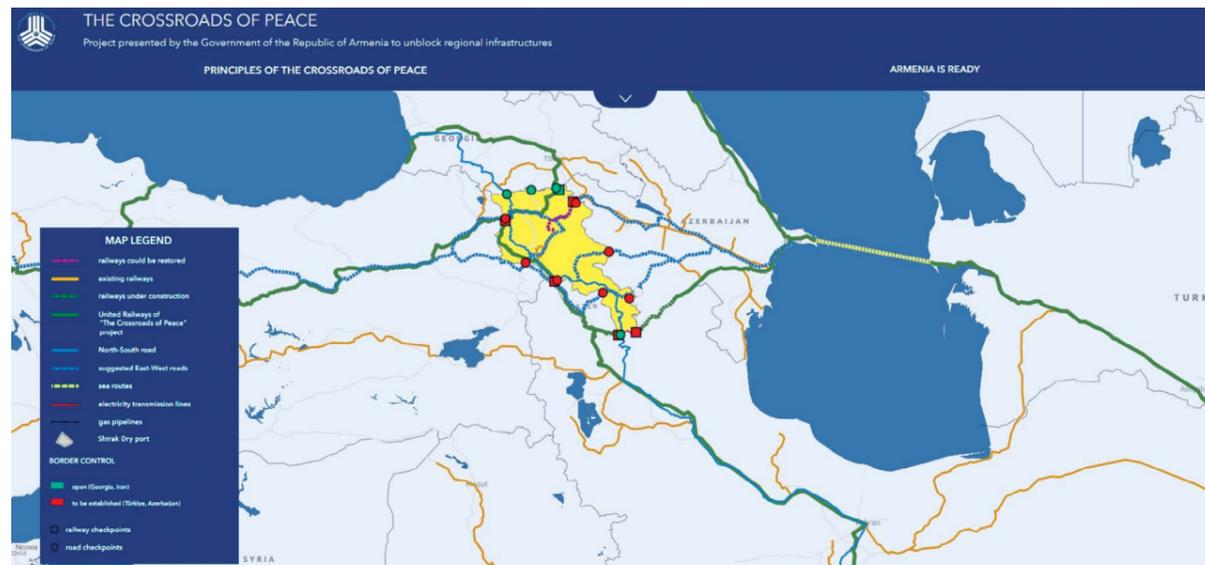
**Principle No. 4:** All countries shall use each other’s infrastructure on the basis of equality and reciprocity. Certain simplifications of border and customs control procedures may be implemented on the basis of the principles of equality and reciprocity.



Armenia’s “Crossroads of Peace” Initiative

The negotiations on the unblocking of regional communications had long been conducted by Armenia, with varying intensity and degrees of success, across several tracks, primarily with the United States, the European Union, and Russia, followed by Turkey and not mentioning also the ongoing negotiations with Azerbaijan. At the same time, over a period of two years, Armenia's Prime Minister and Foreign Ministry actively presented the initiative, beyond Armenia itself, in the capitals of neighboring countries and other potentially interested states around the world. These efforts pursued multiple objectives: the international promotion of the project, the identification and enhancement of potential stakeholders' interests, as well as the alleviation of concerns and the management of risks.

At the Silk Road International Conference held in **Tbilisi, Georgia**, on 26 October 2023, invoking the historical Silk Road and its trade-economic and political-cultural impacts, and within the context of open borders and established peace between countries as well as the unblocking of regional communications, the Prime Minister of Armenia emphasized, for actors positioned along routes passing through Tbilisi and Georgia, the importance of **"a short and efficient route connecting the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean, both by rail and by road", which "can become an effective route linking the Gulf with the Black Sea, including Georgian ports".**<sup>39</sup> One of the core meanings of the project, according to Prime Minister Pashinyan, was **"the development of communications between Armenia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Islamic Republic of Iran by means of renovating, building, and operating roads, railways, pipelines, cables, and electricity lines".**



Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" Initiative with all border check points and routes

On 9 December 2023, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia presented **"The Crossroads of Peace" initiative and its principles to Tehran** in an article<sup>40</sup> published in an Iranian state media outlet. Among the key issues of interest to Iran were the status of its northern border and compliance with the "red lines" repeatedly articulated by Tehran. In this context, Iran has consistently attached particular importance to guaranteed access to northbound communications through the territory of Armenia, in light of the demands advanced by Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey, for the establishment of a so-called "corridor".

By restating the four fundamental principles of the "The Crossroads of Peace" in the Deputy Minister's article, Armenia highlighted to Iran the routes and components of particular relevance to it, including **"the**

**international transit routes connecting the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman with the Black Sea and the 'North-South' road corridor", as well as "the creation of new conditions for the restoration of the Meghri railway, which will become an additional link between Armenia and Iran".** It was further noted that **"this restored railway will not only connect Azerbaijan and Armenia, the south-western regions of Azerbaijan with the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic, but will also provide qualitatively new communications between the southern and north-western regions of Armenia".** In its message to Tehran, Armenia also **"did not underestimate the Gyumri-Kars railway, which will create entirely new trade and economic opportunities for Armenia, Iran, Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan".** Finally, the project was considered important for Iran also because of **"the possibility of strengthening communications through the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran with another important partner, the Republic of India, and in particular the key port of Chabahar".** As a result, **"the 'Crossroads of Peace' will connect not only the countries of the region, but also the East with the West, the North with the South, the Persian Gulf with the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea with the Caspian Sea".**

The discussions in the **United States** on the Peace Agreement, the unblocking of regional transport links, and the principles of the "Crossroads of Peace" had a four-year history as a platform complementary to and harmonized with the Brussels format. Already under the outgoing administration of Joe Biden, the signing in January, 2025 of the Charter on Strategic Partnership elevated relations between Armenia and the United States to the level of strategic partnership, and the "Crossroads of Peace" was declared, among other strategic areas, as one of the objectives of bilateral cooperation. The uncertainties that emerged following Donald Trump's assumption of the presidency of the United States, with regard to the entire spectrum of his foreign policy and to further interest in that agreement, were resolved in the context of the four-day visit of the Prime Minister of Armenia to the United States on 7 February 2025. In addition to meetings with expert circles at Washington-based think tanks (the Atlantic Council and Georgetown University) and a speech at the International Religious Freedom Summit, Prime Minister Pashinyan also held a brief meeting at the White House with US Vice President James David Vance. According to American diplomatic and Armenian official circles<sup>41</sup>, partially informed of the meetings content, it was at that time that the idea of TRIPP was proposed and discussed by the Armenian side and included in the package of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agenda, where it received the approval of US President Donald Trump. Not least in increasing Trump's interest was the difficulty of concluding a quick "peace deal" with Russia over Ukraine and the prospect of being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

**In the Russian and Eurasian direction**, the Prime Minister of Armenia briefly presented the advantages of the initiative for the EAEU, for Iran as an observer state, and for two Central Asian republics that are organization's members, Kazakhstan among them, at the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council on 8 May 2024. Pashinyan drew the attention of the participating countries to the development of transport infrastructure, which would "give additional impetus to the growth of the trade turnover between the countries", stressing in that context **"the "Crossroads of Peace" project initiated by the Armenian government, the purpose of which is to create the necessary logistical conditions for the development of trade and economic relations between all interested states, based on full respect for the sovereignty and jurisdiction of states, equality and reciprocity".**<sup>42</sup> It was, indeed, particularly for the President of the Russian Federation that the Prime Minister of Armenia emphasized Armenia's unchanged opposition to the "corridor" principle in the process of unblocking of regional communications, stressing that Russia itself had not demonstrated any particular interest in this project. Armenia's approaches and intentions regarding unblocking were well known to Russia, just as Russia's approaches, intentions and capabilities had been well known to Armenia since the establishment of the trilateral commission on unblocking in 2021.

Exactly one year earlier, on 5 May 2023, when the "Crossroads of Peace" initiative had not yet been launched,

<sup>41</sup> Based on testimonies from closed, off-the-record conversations and discussions held in Europe and in Yerevan during September–November with American experts who participated in or were closely familiar with the Washington and preceding meetings, senior diplomats from both Democratic and Republican administrations, and senior sources within the Government of Armenia.

<sup>42</sup> At the meeting of the Eurasian Supreme Council, Prime Minister Pashinyan referred to the "Crossroads of Peace" project in the context of transport infrastructure development, 08.05.2024

<sup>39</sup> Prime Minister Pashinyan presents the "Crossroads of Peace" project and its principles at the Tbilisi International Forum, 26.10.2023

<sup>40</sup> Article by Deputy Minister Vahan Kostanyan published by IRNA news agency: "The 'Crossroads of Peace' stems from the interests of the Armenian and Iranian peoples", 09.12.2023

at the jubilee 30th meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council the Prime Minister of Armenia devoted a substantial part of his speech<sup>43</sup> to a statement made by the President of Azerbaijan, who was participating in the meeting in observer status. The Azerbaijani President had accused Armenia of failing to fulfil the obligations undertaken under the trilateral statements, in particular of not providing a "corridor" linking Azerbaijan with Nakhijevan. Pashinyan read out and interpreted Points 6 and 9 of the 9 November Statement specifically for those present and for the President of the Russian Federation, declaring that "the Declaration mentions only one corridor, and it is the Lachin corridor, which was supposed to be under the control of Russian peacekeepers, but, unfortunately, is illegally blocked by Azerbaijan", and which "must remain under the control of the Russian peacekeeping forces, meaning that no one else should exercise control over this corridor". As for what the Azerbaijani President had termed a "corridor", the Prime Minister placed it within the context of paragraph 9 on the unblocking of communications and reaffirmed Armenia's position: "I want to confirm the readiness of the Republic of Armenia to unblock all transport and economic connections and communications in the region that pass through the territory of the Republic of Armenia - we call it the "Armenian Crossroads" and we are ready to open regional communications within the framework of the sovereignty and jurisdiction of those countries through which they pass. I mean the transport and economic communications mentioned in Point 9 of the trilateral declaration of November 9, 2020 and the trilateral statement of January 11, 2021." The challenge thrown directly at the President of Azerbaijan, and indirectly also at the President of the Russian Federation - "It is very interesting to know that Russia supports the project you mentioned. To be honest, this is the first time I have heard about it" - remained unanswered by both Putin and Aliyev.

Consequently, one year later, following this exchange, at the meeting of the same body the Prime Minister of Armenia merely confined himself to once again formally recalling Armenia's Crossroads of Peace initiative, being fully aware of Moscow's attitude towards it.

The presentation of the "Crossroads of Peace" initiative to Turkey first took place briefly in autumn 2024 in New York, on the margins of the session of the United Nations General Assembly, during the Pashinyan-Erdogan meeting held on 24 September at the "Turkish House". On that occasion, Prime Minister Pashinyan presented President Erdogan with the publication on "The Crossroads of Peace", while Turkish President reciprocated with his own book "A Fairer World Is Possible".<sup>44</sup> A more detailed presentation and discussion of the "Crossroads of Peace" initiative for Turkey and with Turkey took place one year later, on 21 June 2025, during Armenian Prime Minister's visit to Istanbul. According to the Armenian leader, whereas during the meeting in New York the previous year he had managed to speak with President Erdogan about the project only in very general terms, the purpose of the Istanbul visit was to present to the Turkish President Armenia's "**positions, approaches and proposals in greater detail**", since "**the Middle Corridor is an important agenda item for Turkey, and the Crossroads of Peace can form part of it**". In his assessment, as a result of the visit "Turkey is now sufficiently informed about our positions and their nuances".<sup>45</sup>

Given that the negotiations on the text of the Peace Treaty with Azerbaijan had already been concluded by that time, thereby also relieving Turkey of pressure from Baku on the issue of opening the border with Armenia, and that the fundamental concept of TRIPP had already been agreed with the United States, the evolving negotiations in trilateral and bilateral formats with Ankara and Washington required synchronization, in order for Armenia to become a link in the "Middle Corridor" stretching through Turkey, then in the Caucasus through Georgia and Azerbaijan, and further into Central Asia through the Turkic-speaking states, first and foremost Kazakhstan.

The visit of Prime Minister of Armenia to Istanbul constituted the final adjustment prior to the meeting in Abu Dhabi scheduled for 10 July, at which Armenia and Azerbaijan finally agreed on the entire package

<sup>43</sup> *The Prime Minister participated in the session of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council. Nikol Pashinyan responded to the "corridor" wording of the President of Azerbaijan, 25.05.2023*

<sup>44</sup> *Pashinyan presented Erdoğan with the book "Crossroads of Peace", while Erdoğan presented his book "A Fairer World Is Possible", 24.09.2024*

<sup>45</sup> *"The Middle Corridor" is an important item on Turkey's agenda, of which the "Crossroads of Peace" may become a part: Prime Minister, 21.06.2025*

of agreements.<sup>46</sup> Ahead of the Abu Dhabi meeting, the US Ambassador to Turkey disclosed details of the discussions between Armenia and the United States regarding the idea of TRIPP, describing that agreement as important for Turkey and for the Middle Corridor as a whole<sup>47</sup>.

## FROM OBSCURITY TO VISIBILITY IN GLOBAL TRANSPORT PROJECTS

Armenia's Crossroads of Peace and TRIPP initiatives did not arise solely from the unfavorable regional realities that have taken shape for the country in recent years and the need to respond to the acute security threats they have generated, and/or from the prospect of taking advantage of newly emerging and newly opened opportunities across a much wider geographical space. Their strategic foundations are no less, if not more, firmly rooted in the bitter lessons and experience accumulated over the past three decades, which have led to a radical transformation of the paradigm of domestic and foreign policy pursued by the country.

Formerly, the prevailing political framework was characterized by a fragile dependency. It focused on coexisting with systemic hostility from Turkey and Azerbaijan by outsourcing deterrence to a third country—Russia. Consequently, Armenia operated within a state of enforced isolation, where its primary channels for international communication and commerce were limited to the transit routes of Georgia and Iran.

The results of such a policy brought Armenia not only to a painful, but to an extremely perilous juncture, when it realized that, as a consequence of the paradigm it had adopted, the indivisible unity of "security and development" had not been ensured. This was due, inter alia, to the deepening of its isolation and its diminishing "usefulness" to others and to the world; to the fact that its adversaries had developed several times more rapidly and had built alliances of interdependence and mutual strategic importance with one another and with other powers; and, finally, to serious miscalculations regarding all of this and regarding the "third superpower expected to restrain its enemies".

From all of this, official Yerevan has concluded that further dynamics under such a paradigm are not in its interests in terms of security and development; moreover, on this time even the very existence of the Armenian statehood may be at stake, both because of falling behind in development and in security terms. Consequently, the paradigm shall be fundamentally transformed into "**peace with all, good-neighborliness, openness, initiative, engagement and interdependence**" paradigm, for which "the Crossroads of Peace" initiative and the "Peace Agenda" have been put forward.

A brief review of regional developments over the past three decades from the perspective of the evolution of transport connectivity projects perhaps not only makes it possible to understand the strategic foundations of Armenia's initiatives, but also to assess their impact on the overall dynamics and on the behavior and decisions of the main actors, as well as to evaluate the changes that Yerevan's initiatives have brought about and continue to bring about.

The Caucasus and Central Asia, interconnected through all forms of transport links, have long been of strategic importance in the plans of the EU, the United States, Russia and China, and, somewhat later, also India.

<sup>46</sup> *Press release following the meeting between Prime Minister of Armenia and President of Azerbaijan in Abu Dhabi, 10.07.2025*

<sup>47</sup> *Strengthening U.S.-Türkiye Relations and Advancing Relations with Syria, FPC Briefing, 11.07.2025*



The railway network from Europe to Far Asia and the "Silk Railway"

Ceyhan oil pipeline,<sup>b</sup> in operation since 2006, and the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum, or South Caucasus gas pipeline<sup>c</sup> operating since mid-2007. The unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, the absence of Turkey–Armenia relations and the closure of the border between the two countries by Ankara excluded Armenia's participation in such projects.

Among the interregional transport connectivity programs implemented during that period, one of those that envisaged and considered a certain degree of Armenian participation was perhaps the EU-supported Europe–Caucasus–Asia Transport Corridor (TRACECA)<sup>d</sup>, whose strategic objective was defined as the development of a West–East transport corridor from Europe to Asia via the Black Sea, the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, built upon the Trans-European Networks located within the EU, the Pan-European transport corridors in Europe, particularly the Black Sea Pan-European Transport Area, and the new Silk Road leading to Asia. To achieve these objectives, the program envisaged EU support for the political and economic independence of the former Soviet republics included in it, by increasing their access to the European and global markets through road, rail and maritime routes.<sup>48</sup>



Europe–Caucasus–Asia Transport Corridor (TRACECA)

<sup>48</sup> TRACECA programme official website - <https://traceca-org.org/en/home/>

Over the past decades, various concepts and projects have consistently been discussed regarding railway, motorway, maritime and energy transportation between Europe and China and India and in the opposite direction, in the spirit of reviving the "Silk Road", and bypassing Russia. Their overland routes could not avoid the Caucasus and Central Asia. From the perspective of such megaprojects, the period from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s was marked by the launch of several tangible intra-regional energy, motorway and railway transport projects, such as the Baku–Tbilisi–

Nevertheless, the location of the Permanent Secretariat in Baku, as well as the key role assigned to Azerbaijan both within TRACECA and in another EU-funded program, INOGATE<sup>e</sup> in the context of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, reduced Armenia's gains from these initiatives to a minimum, and even more so its visibility in all types of West–East transport megaprojects and on the radar of the powers interested in them.

Anticipating the geopolitical consequences and risks of Armenia's exclusion from the regional projects and its marginalization, the United States and the European Union not only refrained from providing political support to the Turkish–Azerbaijani–Georgian pro-

posal for the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, which was launched somewhat later than the other projects (the EU "welcomed the new railway corridor" only in 2017<sup>49</sup>), but also declined to assist with the project's financing or promotion or with the participation of their companies, unlike in the case of the construction of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline or the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum gas pipeline. Instead, Brussels and Washington continued to advocate the reopening of the already existing Kars–Gyumri–Tbilisi railway line and, in 2009, undertook the mediation efforts with Russia to normalize Armenian–Turkish relations.

However, Turkey's precondition-based position, shaped by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, soon drove the initialed Armenian–Turkish protocols into a deadlock. The further deepening of Armenia's isolation and blockade led to an increase in its dependencies on Russia and Iran. The relations between Moscow and the West were already visibly deteriorating following the "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine and the brief Russo–Georgian War of 2008, while the relations of the West with Tehran had long been at an impasse. Under such context, the "remaining place" for Armenia in regional connectivity projects amounted merely to "a road leading nowhere", more precisely, limited-volume cargo transportation through its territory from Iran to Georgia and in the opposite direction, often under difficult mountainous conditions and along roads generally unsuitable and poorly maintained for such freight transport.

By contrast, Georgia's and Azerbaijan's nodal, strategic and transit location, Azerbaijan's hydrocarbon reserves and the prospect of transiting the Central Asian energy resources through its territory, the absence of conflict and the existence of good-neighborly relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan, and their firm or soft distancing from Russia not only rendered them as strategic partners but also elevated them to countries of strategic importance for the architects of, or states interested in, these megaprojects. This was particularly the case as the pro-European political force that came to power in Georgia following the Rose Revolution in 2004 (and, a year later, in Ukraine) had turned the country into a center of gravity and, owing to its value orientation, into the key focal point for the EU-implemented programs, which, alongside strategic infrastructure development, concentrated on the comprehensive strengthening and integration of political-economic, scientific-cultural and socio-humanitarian ties with the economies joining the initiative.



China's Belt and Road Initiative and its 6 economic zones

<sup>49</sup> EU Statement on opening of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, Official website of the EU, 30.10.2017

## ARMENIA AND THE INTENSIFYING “GAME OF CORRIDORS” IN THE WIDER REGION

In essence, alongside its pursued other strategic objectives, and also in the context of pursuing the long-term goals of the above-mentioned West–East transport programs, the European Union in 2009 inaugurated its Eastern Partnership initiative, bringing together six countries located along various branches of the extensive corridor stretching from Europe to Central Asia – Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, with the aim of maximizing political and economic ties with them, developing connectivity and infrastructure projects, and consolidating these through value-based, political, economic and socio-cultural interdependencies. As a result of the formalized Euro-Atlantic orientation and EU membership aspirations of three of these countries, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, the EU launched negotiations in 2009 on Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas Agreements. One year later, in 2010, Armenia also joined these negotiations, pursuing a multi-vector and balancing foreign policy and seeking the unblocking of communications.<sup>50</sup> Russia increasingly perceived this process as preparation for further EU enlargement, viewing its prospective outcomes as the Euro-Atlanticization of most of the Black Sea region and two-thirds of the Caucasus, and its own withdrawal from these regions, with respective complications in its access to the Mediterranean and to Iran.

Although the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas Agreements with EaP four participating countries were successfully negotiated and finalized by November 2013 for signing at the EU Eastern Partnership Summit, at the final stage, i.e., the Vilnius Summit, only three of them reached the finish line. Three years into the negotiations, Armenia became a failed case. First, the EU–US–Russia efforts to normalize the Armenian–Turkish relations and to open the Armenia–Turkey border, and thereby remove Armenia’s blockade and restore railway and motorway links with Europe, had already collapsed. Subsequently, under Russia’s hybrid pressure exerted on Armenia in 2012–2013 (including the provision of offensive weapons to Azerbaijan and the increased risk of escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, pressure through gas pricing and gas debt, violations of the rights of Armenian labor migrants in Russia, the activation of proxy forces in domestic political life and the creation of risks of instability, among others), official Yerevan on 3 September 2013 announced its intention to join the Eurasian Economic Union, which Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan were to establish one year later, in 2014, as a mirror-image counterweight and competitor to the European Union. In this way, Moscow drove a wedge into the Eastern European, South Caucasian and Central Asian theatres, anchoring its political and economic presence in, or in close proximity to, the key West–East transport hubs.

Russia, however, sought not only to rule out any possible reversal by official Yerevan from the Eurasian integration (Armenia became a member of the EAEU in January 2015) and to “institutionally” lock it in for the long term, but also, through the skillful encouragement of Azerbaijan’s planned military intentions, to disrupt, at best, and at worst to bring under its own control, the West–East transport corridor in the Caucasus and Central Asia that bypassed Russian territory.

In the summer of 2014, this policy enabled Moscow to generate heightened tensions both along the Artsakh–Azerbaijan line of contact and on the Armenia–Azerbaijan state border, creating the mirage of a large-scale war. In August 2014, the Kremlin “unblocked” the deadlock between Yerevan and Baku by restarting Armenian–Azerbaijani negotiations beyond the OSCE Minsk Group format and exclusively under its own mediation and on Russian terms, the negotiations that had already reached a deadlock back in 2011 in Kazan.

The concepts under negotiation came to be conventionally known as the “Russian Plan” or the “Lavrov Plan”, whose “transport and connectivity” dimension so clearly revealed Russia’s intentions in this sphere that even

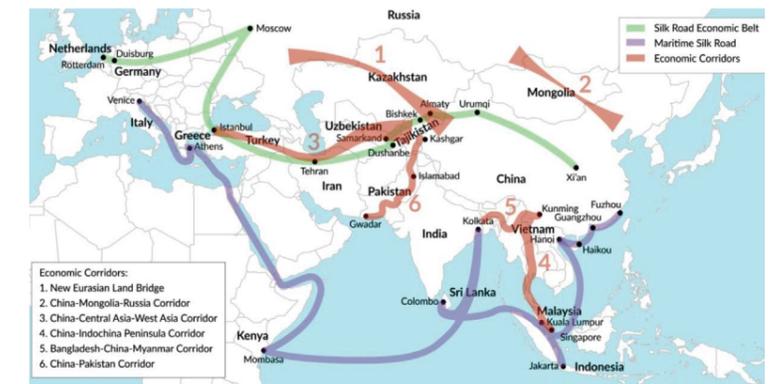
its author himself summarized their essence in the succinct formula: “territories in exchange for unblocking”<sup>51</sup>. In particular, the plan envisaged Armenia’s return to Azerbaijan of all seven districts adjacent to the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, with the exception of the Lachin/Berdzor corridor connecting the Armenian-populated area with Armenia under certain parameters, and the deployment there of the Russian, the Russian–Belarusian or CSTO peacekeeping contingents. In return, all regional communications severed for decades by the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict would be unblocked.

All of this compelled Russia, in order to accelerate its own economic integration projects, its “peacebuilding mediation”, and its transport corridor agenda, to act not only on the Eastern European “front”, countering EU enlargement among pro-European states and the development of West–East transport projects passing through them, but also along its entire southern perimeter, where the developments were intensifying and directly contributed to, complemented or reinforced this axis, in the form of announced or emerging rival transport corridor initiatives. There were several such initiatives.

First, in the Caucasus and the Near East, Turkey, Moscow’s strategic rival and tactical partner, had already, around the time of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, put forward the idea of a “Caucasus Stability Pact”, thereby signaling its ambition to increase its influence there and to rank second only to Russia. One year later, in October 2009, at a summit of the leaders of Turkic-speaking countries held in Azerbaijan’s exclave of Nakhijevan (an idea first proposed by Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev back in 2006), the Nakhijevan Agreement was adopted, institutionalizing this informal grouping as the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, with its headquarters in Istanbul and a mission to develop comprehensive cooperation among Turkic-speaking states and peoples up to and beyond Central Asia.<sup>52</sup>

By 2012, at its second summit, this comprehensive cooperation had entered a new phase with the adoption of a unified Turkic flag, combining the symbols of the flags of the four founding members – Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – and the consistent expansion of cooperation in 27 fields, ranging from political and diplomatic to economic, energy, tourism, customs, transport, education, space and others, with the aim of promoting interaction and rapprochement between states and peoples.

On Russia’s Far Eastern flank, its other competitor, a historical adversary turned strategic partner, China announced a major initiative of its own. On 7 September 2013, in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, President Xi Jinping declared China’s intention to develop the “Silk Road Economic Belt” as a large-scale infrastructure and economic cooperation program linking Asia, Europe and Africa. One month later, in October, he announced in Indonesia China’s intention to build the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, aimed at promoting cooperation in South-East Asia and beyond. These two initiatives were subsequently consolidated into the broader “One Belt, One Road”, later renamed to the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), envisaging six main economic corridors to provide land and maritime connectivity between China and the rest of the world, facilitating the flow of goods, energy and information while simultaneously promoting regional economic integration<sup>9</sup> The third of these economic zones – the China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAE) – largely follows the route of the ancient Silk Road,



The Middle Corridor or Trans-Caspian International Transport Route

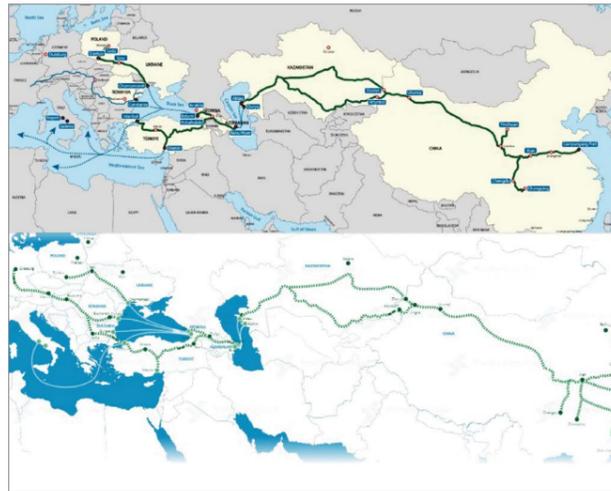
<sup>51</sup> Digging out of Deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh, ICG report, 20.12.2019

<sup>52</sup> Official website of the Organization of Turkic States: <https://turkicstates.org/en>

<sup>50</sup> Armenia welcomes the approval of the mandate to launch negotiations on an Association Agreement with the European Union, 13.05.2010

beginning in Xinjiang and, bypassing Russia, passing through the five Central Asian states and seventeen countries of West Asia, ultimately reaching the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Peninsula.

Two months after this announcement, on 7 November 2013, the Second International Transport and Logistics Business Forum "New Silk Road", held in Astana, marked the launch of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), also known as the Middle Corridor. At the forum, the heads of the national railway company "Kazakhstan Temir Zholy", Azerbaijan Railways CJSC, and Georgian Railway JSC signed an agreement to establish a coordinating committee for the development of this route.<sup>53</sup>



The Middle Corridor or Trans-Caspian International Transport Route

Croatia and Hungary, cargo would proceed to Germany and Switzerland; and a third from Ukraine's Black Sea port of Odesa, via the railway network to Poland, as well as, in another direction, through the Istanbul logistics hub in Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea or again to Europe. Such geography of the route generated objective interest among the founding countries in including, as regular and associate members of the association, not only themselves but also Turkey, Ukraine, Poland and Bulgaria, as well as railway, port and freight-forwarding companies.

The planned route of the Middle Corridor is synchronized, on the one hand, with the third economic zone of China's "Belt and Road" Initiative; on the other, with the United States' "West-East" concept and the corresponding EU's Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor (TRACECA); and, thirdly, with the integration area of the Organization of Turkic States, whose members decided in 2024 to act in a consolidated manner in support of the Middle Corridor.



North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC)

From the outset, the railway route of the Corridor was envisaged to run from South-East Asia and China (the port of Lianyungang), through Kazakhstan to its Caspian ports (Aktau and Kuryk), from where cargo would be transported by ferry across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan (Baku) and then, again by rail, onwards to Georgia. Whereas the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, launched in 2007 by a joint decision of the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and commissioned in October 2017, was intended to enable the route to continue through Turkish territory and branch off towards the ports of Istanbul and Mersin, at the same time ferry services across the Black Sea from Georgia's Black Sea ports (Batumi and Anaklia) were to reach European countries in three directions: one to the port of Burgas in Bulgaria; another to the port of Constanța in Romania, from where, via the railway network through Serbia,

and then through Romania, Hungary, Croatia and Poland, cargo would proceed to Germany and Switzerland; and a third from Ukraine's Black Sea port of Odesa, via the railway network to Poland, as well as, in another direction, through the Istanbul logistics hub in Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea or again to Europe. Such geography of the route generated objective interest among the founding countries in including, as regular and associate members of the association, not only themselves but also Turkey, Ukraine, Poland and Bulgaria, as well as railway, port and freight-forwarding companies.

The planned route of the Middle Corridor is synchronized, on the one hand, with the third economic zone of China's "Belt and Road" Initiative; on the other, with the United States' "West-East" concept and the corresponding EU's Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor (TRACECA); and, thirdly, with the integration area of the Organization of Turkic States, whose members decided in 2024 to act in a consolidated manner in support of the Middle Corridor.

As a counterbalance to these integration-driven transport developments, from the same period Russia accelerated the implementation of the North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC)<sup>h</sup> agreement signed with India and Iran in 2002. The initial land-sea route envisaged freight transportation from India's port of Mumbai to Iran's port of Chabahar and across Iranian territory, then via the Caspian Sea (through the maritime zones of Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia) to Russia's Baltic ports, and from there to the North Sea and Europe, and in the opposite direction.

In 2015, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran agreed to an expanded version of the NSTC to counter the influence of competing EU/U.S., Chinese, and Turkish transit corridors. By integrating key regional players into this North-South framework, Moscow sought to disrupt or co-opt rival projects, ensuring that regional trade routes shifted in its favor. It was decided to develop a railway corridor by constructing the missing 205-km (127-mile) of Astara-Rasht-Qazvin railway line, tunnels, and a 164-km (102-mile) road section on the Astara-Rasht stretch (which, despite numerous delays, has still not been completed or put into operation). Although the Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia railway line also enabled Kazakhstan to join the project, a further ten routes were nevertheless proposed along the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea and in Central Asia, aimed at attracting and involving the Central Asian states. These routes synchronized the NSTC with the Ashgabat Agreement and extended the corridor through Iranian territory to Oman, in the Gulf, where it would "intersect" with the maritime shipping routes of rival actors – China, India, the United States and the European Union.

Despite the strategic cooperation between Russia, Iran and India in this transport game, the interest of New Delhi and Tehran in gaining access to the Black Sea via the territories of Armenia and Georgia gave rise to the "Persian Gulf-Black Sea" transport corridor initiative and opened up tentative prospects for Armenia to become part of India-Iran-Armenia multimodal transport chains, through which these countries would be connected not only with Russia but also with the European Union.

Within these conditions, Armenia not only embarked on the construction of the North-South motorway linking Georgia and Iran, which repeatedly failed due to large-scale corruption and misappropriation, but from 2012 onwards also began to consider major, high-cost program scenarios for the construction of a new railway connection with Iran, as well as for the expansion and modernization of its domestic railway network. Although, from the perspective of Iran and India, the European branch of the NSTC bypassed Russia, Moscow's resistance to this was virtually non-existent, since Armenia's railway network had been under Russian concessionary management since 2008, the country was a member of and deeply involved in all military-political and economic alliances and projects architected by Russia, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict kept Yerevan in a position of "hostage-like" dependence on Moscow. Meanwhile, the change of government in Georgia in 2012 had made the new authorities in that country more inclined towards cooperation with Russia. Thus, Russia succeeded in excluding Armenia from the "European project" in the Caucasus, preventing even its association with the EU and its customs area via the Georgian territory, and entrenching its de jure and de facto supremacy over Yerevan's political and economic decision-making.



North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) routes extended by Ashgabat agreement



Iran's early vision for transit routes

<sup>53</sup> Official website of "Trans-Caspian International Transport Route" Association



Persian Gulf and Black Sea corridor

In Central Asia, it managed to draw Kazakhstan into its political and economic orbit, despite the latter being assigned pivotal importance in the West–East transport projects of the EU, the United States, China and Turkey. It also succeeded in toppling the pro-European government in Georgia and replacing it with a force inclined towards synchronization with Russia; notwithstanding this, for political and pragmatic reasons Georgia increasingly oriented its strategic vision within the framework of the Middle Corridor more towards the infrastructure components of the Chinese initiative than towards their European analogue, the principal and fundamental difference between the two, despite a certain synchronization of routes, lying in their underlying value systems and interests. Although the new Georgian authorities in recent years have not made any tangible concessions aimed at achieving a breakthrough in relations with Russia, for Moscow it was nevertheless reassuring that an evolutionary shift was being recorded in Georgia in terms of commitments to the value foundations of transport projects, i.e. from the European towards the Eastern/Chinese ones.

In addition to Armenia, the Russian hybrid pressure also intensified against the other two countries associating with the EU, namely Moldova and Ukraine, culminating in the 2013 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine through a so-called “referendum”. Although Russia suffered repeated setbacks in Moldova, the resolution of the Ukrainian issue, even by military means, was increasingly becoming the last remaining resort to shut down the “integration game” on the Eastern European front and to exclude the Black Sea and Ukraine–Poland segments of the West–East transport corridor.

To weaken the Caucasian segment of the Middle Corridor and adapt it to the North–South axis, one crucial element was still missing: Azerbaijan. In addition to its ambition to be involved in new transport projects, official Baku above all continued to demand a high price from Moscow both for providing it, in the event of the unblocking of regional communications, with a railway connection to Iran via Nakhijevan, and for its possible future involvement in Russia-led Eurasian integration projects and even in the CSTO. That price was the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in accordance with Azerbaijan’s own interests and vision, through Russia’s “exclusive efforts and mediation”.

In a similar manner, Baku demanded that Iran also reposition itself positively towards changing the status quo in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone through political means, and, if that proved impossible, through military ones as well, in order to secure, via its territory, access in two directions: through the Nakhijevan railway, via Armenia and Georgia to the Black Sea and then to European and Eurasian markets, or via the railway line of the NSTC to the EAEU market, i.e. Russia and Kazakhstan.

It was this dynamic that also lay at the heart of the outbreaks of the 2020 War in Nagorno-Karabakh and the 2022 War in Ukraine, where the contest over transport routes and geopolitics has, regrettably, continued to ignite new flashpoints of conflict to this day. Moreover, these developments have resulted in deadlocks for everyone and in relation to everyone. Although the “Crossroads of Peace” and TRIPP constitute only small components in the game of major transport megaprojects, they nevertheless offer an opportunity to remove these deadlocks and to guarantee peace.

In Central Asia, it managed to draw Kazakhstan into its political and economic orbit, despite the latter being assigned pivotal importance in the West–East transport projects of the EU, the United States, China and Turkey. It also succeeded in toppling the pro-European government in Georgia and replacing it with a force inclined towards synchronization with Russia; notwithstanding this, for political and pragmatic reasons Georgia increasingly oriented its strategic vision within the framework of the Middle Corridor more towards the infrastructure

## CHANGING BEHAVIORS AND TRAJECTORIES

### The Ankara Pivot: Integrating Armenia into the Middle Corridor without Compromising the Azerbaijan Alliance

Three days after the signing of the Washington Agreements on 8 August 2025, the President of Turkey and the Prime Minister of Armenia held a telephone conversation in which they addressed not only the outcomes of the negotiations in Washington, but also discussed “unblocking of regional communications within the framework of the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and jurisdiction of countries and on the basis of reciprocity, as well as the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity” project.” In this context, bilateral issues between Armenia and Turkey were also discussed, in particular, the implementation of previously reached agreements.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, on August 22, 2025 Ankara formally launched the construction of a new 224-kilometer railway linking its northeastern province of Kars to the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan<sup>55</sup>. The line will run from Kars to Dilucu at the border with Nakhchivan, featuring five new stations: Digor, Tuzluca, Igdir, Aralik, and Dilucu. The project is expected to be completed within four to five years (roughly 2029–2030), and Turkey secured approximately €2.4 billion (\$2.8 billion) in green financing for the project from a group of international lenders.

Although the Washington agreements, and in particular the name given to the TRIPP, were intended to defuse the additional tension and the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the explosive wording and legal regime for the communication zone, Turkey and Azerbaijan officially continue to use the term “Zangezur Corridor” (as enshrined in the Shushi Declaration in May 2021) at least for its section passing through the territory of Armenia and Azerbaijan, even using the toponym Zangezur for the Armenian segment and the name of Armenia on official maps.



Caucasian segments of the Middle Corridor, From the website of Turkey's Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure

In parallel with all this, Turkey and Armenia also exchanged some signals regarding the possible partial reopening of the border. First, on September 12, 2025 Turkey’s Special Envoy for normalization with Armenia, Serdar Kılıç, arrived in Armenia via the land border<sup>56</sup>, and on January 27, 2026 a group of Armenian officials visited the Margara border checkpoint<sup>57</sup>. Armenia’s and Turkey’s special envoys for normalization reached this agreement for third-country nationals and holders of diplomatic passports back in July 2022. Despite these reciprocal steps, in November 2026 the Turkish Foreign Minister still put forward the signing of an Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty as a precondition for opening the border<sup>58</sup>, even hinting at a deadline (first half of 2026), while Azerbaijan put forward an informal precondition for signing that treaty: amending the

<sup>54</sup> Nikol Pashinyan and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hold telephone conversation, 11.08.2025

<sup>55</sup> Turkish project would help make TRIPP the go-to route for Middle Corridor freight, 25.08.2025

<sup>56</sup> Armenian and Turkish special envoys hold talks in Yerevan, OC Media, 12.09.2026

<sup>57</sup> Partial reopening of Armenia–Turkey border expected, no date announced yet, JAM news, 27.01.2026

<sup>58</sup> Turkey Reiterates Precondition for Normalizing Ties with Armenia, 19.11.2026

Armenian constitution, arguing that its preamble refers to the Armenian Declaration of Independence, which mentions the reunification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Even if Turkey's strategic interests in launching the Middle Corridor as soon as possible outweigh those of its ally Azerbaijan, Ankara nevertheless realizes that it will not be operational until Azerbaijan opens its borders with Armenia, and secondly, the necessary infrastructure is created or finalized on various sections of the route. At the same time, Turkey, as a key beneficiary of the transport corridor, clearly does not want to choose between its strategic interests and hurting or losing Azerbaijan.

### **Azerbaijan's Obstructionism vs. Strategic Necessity: Between Regional Competition and the Pursuit of a Strategic Partnership with the U.S.**

Baku's recent preconditions serve more as a strategic lever for pressure than a grounded legal concern. The Armenian Constitutional Court has already exhaustively addressed the issue. It particularly ruled that the 1991 Declaration of Independence's provision referring to the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet's decision of 1989 is not valid and effective in this context as the Nagorno Karabakh, like Armenia and Azerbaijan, also proclaimed its independence in 1991, and that founding document has been superseded later on by the 1995 Constitution. Furthermore, by ratifying the Border Regulation, both Armenia and Azerbaijan have formally accepted the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration as the basis for delimitation, effectively closing the door on future territorial claims.

The real driver of Azerbaijan's obstructionism is Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" initiative. This project threatens Baku's ambition to monopolize regional transit via the North-South and Middle Corridor projects<sup>59</sup>. Baku realizes that a route connecting Russia and Iran through an autocratic Azerbaijan is unattractive to the West. In contrast, the "Crossroads of Peace" is a joint Armenian-American initiative with bipartisan U.S. support. It offers an alternative connecting the Persian Gulf and India to the Black Sea and the EU or Russia through the territory of Armenia, the country with the most pronounced European and democratic aspirations in the region at the moment. By hardening its stance and coordinating with Turkey, Azerbaijan also aims to delay the unblocking of Armenia to force Western investment into the Kars-Nakhichevan segment, and to drop the Armenian initiative from the priority list. Both Ankara and Baku remember how the West once did not welcome and adopted neutrality during the construction of a section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, arguing that it bypasses and marginalizes Armenia.

Along with all this, however, there are also powerful factors that have forced Azerbaijan to attach importance to the lifting of the blockade of Armenia precisely in its own interests: 1) The deterioration of relations with Russia, the growth of Russian influence in Georgia, and the creation of obstacles for Azerbaijani cargo transportation, as Baku witnessed when sending Kazakh, then Russian wheat and Azerbaijani fuel to Armenia<sup>60</sup>; 2) The desire of President Aliyev to upgrade Azerbaijan's relations with the US to the level of a strategic partnership, and to establish relations with the Trump administration, especially since Armenia currently has diplomatic lead in Washington and has brought an American bet on itself, as well as the goal of repealing Resolution 907, which bars military aid from the US; 3) The threat of significant (200%) trade tariffs as President Trump voiced<sup>61</sup>; thus the necessity of complying with Washington-led agreements create a high-stakes environment where continued non-compliance could carry a heavy financial price.

<sup>59</sup> Author's Q&A with the President of Azerbaijan at the Munich Security Conference and Ilham Aliyev's full speech at the panel discussion "Open Corridor Policy? Deepening Trans-Caspian Cooperation", 14.02.2026

<sup>60</sup> Azerbaijani Media Accuse Georgia of Border Delays, Tariff Pressure, *Civil.ge*, 08.12.2025

<sup>61</sup> 'I told both sides: no trade — and then I'd impose 200% tariffs': Trump on Armenia and Azerbaijan, *ABC MEDIA*, 30.12.2025

### **Complementary or Competitive? Georgia's Quest for Regional Stability and Infrastructure Quotas**

Georgia's strategic interests have always been reflected in all the main options of the transport corridor, which were proposed by its European, Turkish and Chinese modifications. Or the basis for Tbilisi's such optimism was conditioned by the infrastructure already built over the decades, which passes through the territory of Georgia. Georgia explicitly frames TRIPP not as a replacement, but as a complementary route that will calibrate regional freight conditions by introducing healthy competition and enhancing overall stability. Tbilisi is viewing TRIPP, the Middle Corridor, and energy pipelines as "complementary layers of one architecture" where Georgia serves as the primary service and logistics hub.

However, TRIPP has seriously undermined Tbilisi's optimism: it is becoming a competing second route, which could leave Georgia out of the game<sup>62</sup>. In addition, the deepening rift between the Georgian authorities and the EU and the US on issues of democracy and European integration, and suspicions and criticisms about increasing Russian influence in the once pro-European country, further increase the competitive chances of the route passing through Armenia in the long-awaited transport game. Baku continues to reassure Tbilisi that the route through Georgia is one of two branches of the corridor, imagining itself as a hub.

Despite the confidence expressed in its public positioning, the irreplaceability of its role in the transport corridor, and the statistics of the increase in the volume of cargo transportation through its territory in recent years, Tbilisi expects cargo transportation to be fairly calibrated, sometimes even hinting at quotas, for the purpose of healthy competition, supplementarily and regional stability between the two routes.

The best architecture adjusting and harmonizing the approaches of the three neighboring countries that envision themselves as a transit hub, excludes the marginalization of Georgia and even balances Azerbaijan's ambitions to project its power over its neighbors, is again Armenia's Crossroads of Peace with all its directions in operation. After all, the region has already seen the consequences of the deepening blockade of one of the countries in the region, Armenia, once, when as a result the country's dependencies were strengthened and best exploited by Russia, helping the latter to record successes in terms of projecting and deepening its influence on the other two.

### **The Russian Shadow: Hybrid Tactics and Infrastructure Leverage in the New Caucasian Transit Game**

The developments that accompanied and then followed the August events perfectly documented for Moscow the failure of its policy in the Caucasus. The Kremlin, which had previously not taken Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" initiative seriously and had hoped that sooner or later it would succeed in forcing Yerevan to accept Russian conditions for unblocking the region's communications routes and controlling the West-East, North-South transport corridors, including the option of a de facto extraterritorial corridor along the TRIPP zone, gradually fixed its position as an outsider.

Moscow, of course, now to a lesser extent, but from time to time emphasizes its contribution to and being in demand for the normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, that is, also for the unblocking of regional communication, especially since it has announced that none of the parties has withdrawn its signature from all the trilateral statements signed under the auspices of Russia.

While the Washington agreements or periodically turbulent Iran-Azerbaijan and Russia-Azerbaijan relations have forced Baku to redefine its interests in relations with and approaches toward Armenia, Moscow is at least

<sup>62</sup> Georgia will not vanish from map; no new route can replace its unique strategic role, says Foreign Minister, *1tv.ge*, 19.02.2026

comforted that still Azerbaijan considers the Crossroad of Peace as direct competitor to its own vision, and persists in promoting the “Zangezur Corridor” discourse. This rhetoric—which deeply irritates Yerevan—is frequently echoed by pro-Russian forces within Armenia, who accuse the government of being prepared to surrender the corridor on unfavorable terms. Consequently, Russia remains hopeful that a new strategic interplay with Baku could thwart the US-backed transit project that changes and endangers Russia-led architecture, routes and controls, or reverses the situation through a change of power in Armenia following to the Georgian scenario.

Another dimension of Russia’s disruptive strategy involves leveraging its control over the Armenian railway network—a key strategic asset—to undermine the implementation of the Crossroads of Peace. It is currently managed by South Caucasus Railway (SCR), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Russian Railways (RZhD), under a 30-year concession agreement signed in 2008 during Robert Kocharyan’s administration. The agreement grants RZhD management of the network until 2038. While the physical assets remain state-owned by Armenia, SCR is responsible for all operations, maintenance, and modernization.

Despite Russia’s commitments to invest approximately \$570 million in infrastructure and rolling stock (Russian officials claim approx. \$325M or over 30 billion rubles have been invested to date), critics argue that many projects remain “on paper,” several routes are abandoned, and the network still relies on outdated Soviet-era equipment. In February 2026, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly warned to end Russian concession, citing several strategic concerns. Speaking at a government briefing, PM acknowledged Armenia is ready to restore critical railway infrastructure using state funds should the Russian side fail to meet its contractual obligations within a reasonable timeframe. He specified several rail sections under the Russian concession that Armenia considers a priority for rehabilitation. These include 1) the Tavush section, at least in the first stage up to and including the Ijevan railway station, 2) the stretch from the Armenia–Turkey border at Akhurik to the currently operational network, and 3) the section running from the Armenia–Nakhijevan border to Yeraskh<sup>63</sup>. Prime Minister proposed that Russia sell its concession rights to a “friendly third country,” such as Kazakhstan, Qatar, or the UAE, briefing that the issue was discussed during his December 22, 2025 meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in St. Petersburg<sup>64</sup>.

However, neither the situation in Russia nor the financial condition of the South Caucasus Railways leave any grounds for optimism that even with a sincere intention to participate in the Peace Crossroads project, Moscow will be able to restore critical railway infrastructures expected by Yerevan within a reasonable timeframe<sup>65</sup>.

Moscow calculates that while it may not be able to openly block projects that diminish its regional influence, it can still erode Armenia’s competitive edge. Without the timely, unified operation of the Crossroads of Peace and TRIPP projects, Armenia’s role will shrink to a mere 42-kilometer link in a larger chain. This delay could force international stakeholders like the U.S., EU, China, and India to prioritize the Nakhichevan-Kars route instead, ultimately making Armenia’s current railway network obsolete.

TRIPP without the Peace Crossroads is less inclusive and could turn countries left out of its route from supporters of de-blockade to resisters, thus creating different hybrid and/or compounded risks for the project. One of Russia’s far-reaching calculations is that if it succeeds in changing the government in Armenia or using its infrastructure leverage or sabotaging the country’s major project—the Crossroads of Peace—it will put Iran or even Georgia in a more nervous mood and force it to treat TRIPP with hostility and work towards its neutralization.

To achieve these goals, Russia surprisingly announced its interest in joining TRIPP and considering Armenia’s proposals<sup>66</sup>. After Yerevan objected to the inclusion of a new railway segment to be built in the TRIPP zone as part of the South Caucasus Railway assets, Moscow was forced to consider other strategies to thwart

<sup>63</sup> Armenia may reclaim rail segments from Russian concession if investment lags, CivilNet, 25.12.2025

<sup>64</sup> Third country with warm ties to Armenia and Russia should acquire railway concession rights – Pashinyan, Armenpress, 13.02.2026

<sup>65</sup> Russian rail operator’s financial troubles raise questions over Armenia concession, CivilNet, 08.01.2026

<sup>66</sup> Russia ready to consider options for joining Trump Road project - Russian Foreign Ministry, Interfax, 30.01.2026

the projects, including escalating its diplomatic or hybrid attacks on Armenia, and relying on obstruction by other regional actors. The Russian Ambassador to Armenia even stated that the “Trump route” could affect Armenia’s membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)<sup>67</sup>.

## Between Resistance and Participation: Iran’s Strategic Response to the Armenian-American Transit Initiatives

Among the factors influencing and shaping Iran’s complex position on TRIPP and the Crossroads of Peace, perhaps the main question is the same as in the case of Georgia, namely, to what extent does this affect its competitive opportunities in connectivity field. As much as TRIPP or the Armenian-American Crossroads of Peace initiatives have preserved Iran’s red lines—the inviolability of Armenia’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and jurisdiction over the routes and in unblocking the regional communications, Tehran is nevertheless frightened by the American presence near its borders.

In the post-August period Tehran sent two interconnected signals: the country’s religious leadership and conservative wing exposed a red flag, while the reformist wing has shown a more constructive stance and even curiosity in integrating Iran’s connectivity approach to emerging Caucasian architecture.

Drawing parallels to the situation in Georgia, the TRIPP project—if implemented without the Crossroads of Peace—will likely intensify Iran’s resistance to the Middle Corridor. Tehran currently views the latter as a tool for “pan-Turkic” interests; however, integrating both projects could transform Iran’s apprehension into active participation. To date, Tehran has signaled a level of trust in Yerevan’s assurances that Armenian territory will not be used to encircle or marginalize Iran, nor serve as a springboard for hostile actions by the U.S. or Israel. Consequently, Iran remains in “standby mode,” closely monitoring every technical detail and diplomatic clarification regarding how these two initiatives will intersect.

Tehran’s active involvement in Armenian infrastructure—most notably the construction of the southern segment of the North-South highway—is a vital strategic link between Iran and Georgia. Yerevan’s commitment to elevating this partnership to a comprehensive and strategic level sends a powerful signal, encouraging Tehran to shift from a cautious stance to one of regional inclusiveness. By prioritizing these ties, Armenia ensures that Iran remains a constructive participant rather than a hostile observer in the region’s evolving transit landscape.

Any scenario in the explosive relations between Iran and the US, from possible US military action to a negotiated solution, will certainly have correctives and consequences for Tehran’s positioning and attitude, and more strategically, on the prospects for future trade routes stretching through its territory to Central and Far Asia. In the most optimistic scenario, even if it is developed within the framework of the “Peace through Strength” approach and as a coercive diplomacy, the new situation with and around Iran will give rise to completely different competitive options for optimizing routes, which are about greater opportunities for all actors. Especially since in recent years Iran has implemented huge infrastructure projects in its territories, forming a transport hub in the northern Tehran-Qazvin section branching to the west (Turkey), north (Caucasus: Armenia and Azerbaijan) and east (Central Asia), not to mention the routes leading to the Gulf, India, and China.

From a strategic perspective, this direction remains extremely important both for the EU as the most optimal route to reach the Indian Ocean and Central Asia, as well as its key countries, such as France, positioned to cooperate with India in trade, innovation, technological and AI. It remains equally vital for the United States, which periodically seeks strategic alignment with New Delhi to calibrate and balance competing regional initiatives. Beyond the U.S. and the EU, connectivity projects led by China and India are increasingly integrated with Digital Silk Road strategies. In this geopolitical landscape, technological superiority has emerged as a decisive dimension in the competition for regional influence.

<sup>67</sup> Сергей Копыркин: Российско-армянские отношения проходят проверку на прочность, №1 (393) январь 2026 г. «Ноев Ковчег»

## Connecting the Corridors: Integrating Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan into Armenia's Strategic Vision

Following 8th of August, alongside the intensified discussions of the Washington Agreements, Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" initiative and the TRIPP project, increased attention was also devoted to the Central Asian dimension, where substantial efforts had already been undertaken in previous years. This was particularly relevant given that Kazakhstan, one of those countries, became a host for direct Armenia–Azerbaijan negotiations in May 2024, is a key part of the Middle Corridor, and, like Armenia, is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. More broadly, the Turkic states of Central Asia—united under the Organization of Turkic States (OTS)—consolidated their support in 2024 for the Middle Corridor / Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. During this same period, Turkey intensified efforts to integrate these Central Asian partners into similar diplomatic and infrastructure discussions with Armenia and other interested stakeholders.

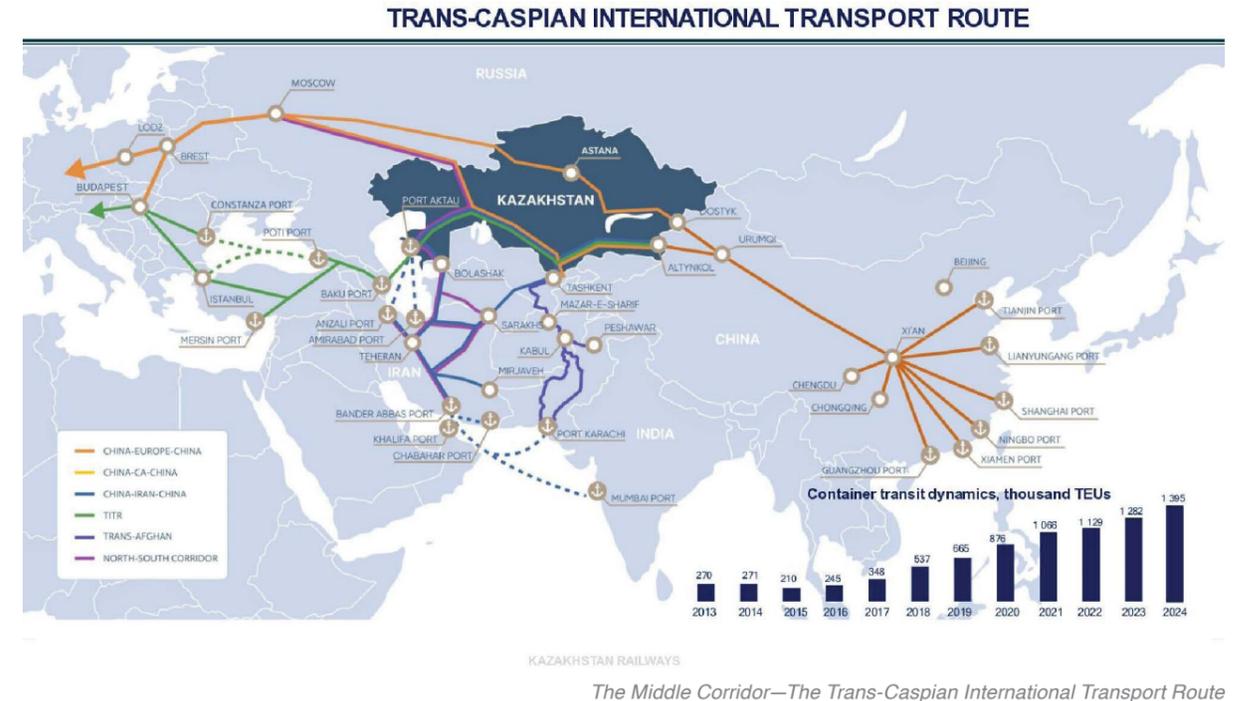
In this context, the Prime Minister of Armenia presented the significance of the Washington Agreements at the CIS Summit held in Dushanbe on 10 October 2025, emphasizing that **"TRIPP project provides Armenia with the opportunity to establish rail and other transportation links with the CIS member state Azerbaijan and other Commonwealth member states"**, which **"as a significant change and a development that will undoubtedly contribute to strengthening economic ties within the CIS and increasing the organization's effectiveness"**, and that **"TRIPP project also opens up new export and import opportunities for CIS countries"**.<sup>6869</sup>

In October 2025, Azerbaijani President, at a meeting with his Kazakh counterpart, announced that he had lifted all previously existing restrictions on the transit of cargo to Armenia. The President of Kazakhstan likewise underscored the historical significance of the Washington Agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan and emphasized that the arrangements reached between the two states open new horizons for cooperation throughout the region and beyond its borders.

This momentum led to the initial transport of Kazakh grain to Armenia via the Azerbaijan-Georgia railway<sup>70</sup>. The same route was subsequently used for the transit of Russian wheat, followed by two landmark shipments of Azerbaijani fuel to Armenia in December 2025 and January 2026<sup>71</sup>.

Of particular importance was the official visit of the Prime Minister of Armenia to Kazakhstan<sup>72</sup>, during which relations between the two countries were elevated to a strategic level, and the sectors designated within the established partnership are substantially linked to the future growth of trade turnover, transit, exports, and imports. Prime Minister Pashinyan also presented in detail the Washington Agreements and the prospects they open up for both regions and both countries.

While previous iterations of the Middle Corridor—or the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route—focused primarily on the Central Asian segment through Kazakhstan, the expanded "Crossroads of Peace" map published by the Armenian government in late 2025 now incorporates Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. This has its logical explanation if the "game of corridors" is viewed within a broader geographical context.



The expanded "Crossroads of Peace" map published by the Armenian government in late 2025

## The New Silk Road Diplomacy: Aligning Armenia's Crossroads of Peace with the Strategic Interests of India, China, and Pakistan

Given that the Crossroads of Peace transitioned into a collaborative Armenian-American strategy following the August 2025 accords, any iteration of this project must be viewed through the lens of Washington's involvement. In the future, this modification also provides an opportunity to use two trade routes being built from Central Asia to the south, including other 2 countries, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: the first is the Trans-

<sup>68</sup> Working visit of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to Tajikistan, Official website of the RA PM, 10.10.2025

<sup>69</sup> The TRIPP project also opens up new export and import opportunities for CIS countries: Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's speech at the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of State, 10.10.2025

<sup>70</sup> Azerbaijan lifts all transit restrictions on goods to Armenia, 21.10.2025, Armenpress

<sup>71</sup> Azerbaijan Makes Second Fuel Shipment to Armenia, Azatutyun, 09.01.2026ss

<sup>72</sup> Nikol Pashinyan and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev discuss a number of issues aimed at further developing multi-sectoral cooperation between Armenia and Kazakhstan, Official website of the RA PM 21.11.2025

Afghan project<sup>73</sup>, which is a Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan project, the second is its competitor, the India-Afghanistan trade route, which is India-Iran-Afghanistan project<sup>74</sup>. India's alternative trade route stretching from its western seaport of Kandla to landlocked Afghanistan by sea through Iran's strategic Chabahar port was launched in 2016, and further encouraged by the US. Donald Trump during his first presidency, urging India to play a bigger role in Afghanistan's development<sup>75</sup>. However, the trade route, including Kabul-Delhi and Kabul-Amritsar airfreight corridors and bilateral trade had been disrupted since 2020, and reactivated only in December of 2025<sup>74</sup>.

Around the same time, India also revised the route of the North-South Corridor (INSTC), which was originally supposed to pass through Azerbaijan. However, deep and strategic cooperation between Pakistan and Azerbaijan led to India's revision of the route, by-passing Azerbaijan and preferring the transport infrastructure of the Central Asian littoral states of the Caspian Sea, as well as considering the prospects of reaching Gorgia's Black Sea ports and then Russia or Europe through the territory of Iran, Armenia and Georgia. In fact, not only because of India's strategic vision of expanding in adjacent and other regions, but also due to these factors and interests, Armenia appeared on New Delhi's radar, receiving not only its political protection during the incursions unleashed against Armenia by Azerbaijan, but also the opportunity for deep military-technical cooperation.

It is noteworthy that only after the signing Washington agreements, in August 2025, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Tianjin, China, Armenia and Pakistan established diplomatic relations: due to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and its strategic relations with Azerbaijan Islamabad had been refusing to even recognize Armenia's independence<sup>75</sup>. Turkey's mediation played an important role in diplomatic breakthrough in relations between the two countries, taking into account Ankara's strategic vision and interests in the various segments and branches of the Middle Corridor.

More than Armenia, Georgia, or Azerbaijan, Ankara is very well aware of the strategic importance of its location in terms of connecting all neighboring or distant continents and regions, "fortifying" desired countries on the axis of routes, and culminating all initiatives within its territory as much as possible. In particular, the third economic zone of China's Belt and Road Initiative, the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAE), makes Turkey the most real transport hub.

Finally, China has become more active in the corridor game not only because of its own Belt and Road Initiative or because of the increasing involvement of rival powers in the regions covered by the route, but also because of Russia's war against Ukraine, as China's economic zones stretching through the latter's territory have also been disrupted. Previously, Beijing's long-term interests were best manifested in the field of projecting and expanding its influence in Central Asia, and in terms of connectivity with Europe, the existing land or sea routes through Russia were quite sufficient. Now the situation has also changed dramatically for it due to the ongoing war, forcing it to pay greater attention and participation in the 3rd economic zone. To this end, China has also invested in the transport infrastructure and regional branches of those **Central Asian countries** that were newly introduced in the latest Armenian-American modification of the Middle Corridor route, but were notably absent from previous maps. Since 2022, China also increased its involvement in the Middle Corridor projects, signing agreements with Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Azerbaijan<sup>76</sup>, to develop infrastructure, mainly seaports along the route.

Another additional interest for Beijing is the transatlantic disunity between the US and the EU, which has also forced Europe to look at China differently. However, unlike Russia and despite global competition, China, the US, and the EU also have interests in the establishment of the Middle Corridor and at least in calibrating and balancing their own initiatives.

<sup>73</sup> *India Launches New Trade Route to Afghanistan Via Iran*, RFERL, 29.10.2017

<sup>74</sup> *India-Afghanistan corridor resets trade links*, 09.12.2025

<sup>75</sup> *Establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Pakistan*, Official website of the RA MFA, 31.08.2025

<sup>76</sup> *How Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan Are Rewiring the Middle Corridor*, The Times of Central Asia, 03.04.2025

## A Value-Based Architecture: Strategic Alignment Between the European Union and the Crossroads of Peace

In the run-up to and after the 2025 Washington Accords, the EU and its member states also reaffirmed their strategic presence in the South Caucasus Central Asian region. At the first EU-Central Asia Summit held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in April 4, 2025, the EU and the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan decided to upgrade their relations to a strategic Partnership. The summit reaffirmed commitments to sign the EPCA with Uzbekistan in 2025 and Tajikistan in 2026. Also, following the 2022 EU-Central Asia declaration of intent on critical raw materials, the 2025-2026 roadmap for a strategic partnership between the EU and Kazakhstan was also approved. The summit also came to support "ongoing efforts towards sustainable transport connectivity and strengthening economic ties through initiatives under the Global Gateway Strategy". In that context, the progress on the Trans Caspian Transport Corridor connecting Europe and Central Asia was highlighted, as well as the launch of a €12 billion Global Gateway investment package to support sustainable transport infrastructure and logistics networks in Central Asia was announced<sup>77</sup>.

While individual EU member states have already established long-standing bilateral strategic partnerships earlier, several leading EU countries also signed specific new agreements or expanded their strategic cooperation frameworks with Central Asian countries in 2025. Particularly the core strategic partnership between France and Kazakhstan, dating back to 2008, was advanced with multiple high-level agreements across energy, aerospace, and digital sectors (including a joint venture for a "sovereign cloud" and AI training), signed as a result of Investment Forum held in May 2025. The intergovernmental commission meeting held in December 2025 in Paris resulted in signing seven new deals covering industrial collaboration, transport, and low-carbon technologies. Germany also signed a strategic partnership agreement with Kazakhstan in October, 2025, focused specifically on sustainable water management and innovation.

The international engagement, investment and operational space opened up by the "Crossroads of Peace" and TRIPP is enormous, and the EU's key participation and role constitute a greatly needed necessity, not only because these initiatives are optimally integrated into the EU's strategic programs, but also because, without the EU involvement, their implementation would be difficult and could disrupt emerging balances. Over the past two years, whenever visiting the European capitals, the Armenian Prime Minister has consistently taken every opportunity to internationalize the "Crossroads of Peace" initiative, and after 8 of August also TRIPP. Prior to the Washington Agreements, he presented the initiative in Prague during the "GLOBSEC 2025" forum on 13 June 2025<sup>78</sup>, and after 8 August, at the European Political Community Summit held in Copenhagen on 2 October 2025<sup>79</sup>.

A key and symbolic moment **vis-à-vis the European Union** was the presentation by the Prime Minister of Armenia of the country's "Crossroads of Peace" initiative and the Armenian-American TRIPP program at the second "Global Gateways" Conference<sup>80</sup>, held in Brussels on 9-10 October 2025. While in her opening remarks, the European Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen emphasized the interconnection of the destinies of the EU and Central Asia, Armenia's PM comprehensively introduced the vision of Armenia as a critical hub for East-West and North-South connectivity, and as a land-locked country which "perfectly understand the benefits of **an inclusive and equitable connectivity** in all its forms, as the lack of connectivity has long been a major obstacle to Armenia's development, economic growth and regional integration." Armenian PM briefed positive dynamics in Armenia-Azerbaijan and in Armenia-Türkiye normalization, as well as stressed the importance of the "Crossroads of Peace" initiative and the "realization of its full potential to change the whole dynamics not only in the South Caucasus, but also far beyond". Along with the introduction

<sup>77</sup> *Joint press release following the first EU-Central Asia summit*, official website of the European Council of the European Union,

<sup>78</sup> *Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's working visit to the Czech Republic*, Official website of the RA PM, 13.06.2025

<sup>79</sup> *Address by Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan at the closing session of the European Political Community Summit*, Official website of the RA PM, 02.10.2025

<sup>80</sup> *Increased EU engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia comes at the right time: Prime Minister*, 09.10.2025

of main principles for opening of the regional infrastructures he particularly emphasized that **"Armenia and the US, together with mutually determined third parties, will implement the TRIPP <...> fully in line with the vision of the "Crossroads of Peace" initiative",** and indirectly invited the EU invest in that **"promising investment project as a third party, and to unlock the region's untapped potential, that "entails a plethora of opportunities for the cooperation from railroads to energy."** Armenia's PM underlined the importance of the EU's "extremely timely" and "increased engagement" **in the South Caucasus and Central Asia** and in those projects to **"foster not only infrastructural ties, but also digital, energy, and regulatory interoperability and institutional alignment with the European Union"**. Moreover, Yerevan highlighted the growing Armenia-EU partnership as "a unique opportunities for anchoring Armenia more deeply and strategically into Europe's evolving connectivity vision, such as the Global Gateway, the Black Sea Strategy, the Middle Corridor, Trans-European Transport Network and more", thus putting Armenian vision and initiatives in a value-based context.<sup>81</sup> Before that, in September 2025, the US Ambassador to Armenia announced in Yerevan that Washington "look forward to partnering with the EU to advance the multiple lines of effort that will make the vision of a Middle Corridor from Central Asia to Western Europe a reality" "as Europe continues to deepen its ties with Armenia"<sup>82</sup>.

Of particular significance for Armenia was the presentation of the project and the Washington Agreements to France, which the Prime Minister of Armenia did on 29 October 2025 during his participation in the 8th Paris Peace Forum<sup>83</sup>. During his working visit to France, he presented both initiatives in the context of establishing open connectivity from **the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Black and Caspian Seas to the shores of the French Mediterranean, and vice versa**, highlighting the potential for linking with Iran, Russia, and Central Asia through Armenia: **"There are numerous arguments and discussions suggesting that some actors may not be interested in opening these transport routes, but in reality, all stakeholders will benefit from this project. By opening the routes with Azerbaijan, we will ultimately have open connectivity between the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Black Sea. We will have new links between the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean. New opportunities will emerge. Armenia will have railway connections with Iran, Russia, and Central Asia. The TRIPP project, which will be implemented across the territory of the Republic of Armenia, is of critical importance because we need access from East to West. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan need that."**

Finally, on December 2, 2025, Brussels and Yerevan also upgraded their relations to the level of strategic partnership. The Strategic Agenda for the EU-Armenia Partnership was signed on December 2, 2025, elevating relations to a strategic level with a focus on security, defense, and visa liberalization. Built upon the foundation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA)<sup>84</sup>, it set ambitious priorities across a wide range of sectors, reflecting the European aspirations of the Armenian people, Armenia's desire and commitments to deepen its integration with the European family, the EU's commitment to supporting Armenia's democratic development, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and socio-economic resilience<sup>84</sup>. Economic cooperation, trade diversification and connectivity became key pillars of that Agenda, also reiterating "both sides' ambition to strengthen cooperation, including working together in new areas such as security and defense, closer collaboration in sectors such as transport, energy and digital connectivity, trade, research and innovation, and stepping up investments under the Global Gateway"<sup>85</sup>.

Despite such a strategic repositioning by the EU in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, and in particular in Armenia, and the continued synchronicity of its programs with the strategic goals of the United States, the exact form and extent of the EU's participation in the envisaged architecture was also a question for Brussels due to the uncertainties surrounding the TRIPP framework and the crisis in relations with Washington over a number of global issues (Greenland, Ukraine, democracy, pan-European security, multilateralism, etc.).

<sup>81</sup> *Increased EU engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia comes at the right time: Prime Minister*, Official website of the RA Prime Minister, 09.10.2025

<sup>82</sup> *Ambassador Kvien's Remarks at 108th NATO Rose-Roth Seminar*, Official website of the U.S. Embassy in Armenia, 23.09.2025

<sup>83</sup> *Negotiations in three directions on the issue of unblocking: what is proposed in each case*, Public Radio 19.12.2025

<sup>84</sup> *Armenia-EU Partnership Strategic Agenda: MFA*, Official website of the RA MFA, 03.12.2025

<sup>85</sup> *"Armenia-EU Partnership Strategic Agenda"*, Full text, Official website of the RA MFA, 03.12.2025

On January 13-14, 2026, a number of clarifications were introduced into the aforementioned uncertainties for all circles and actors interested in TRIPP, including the EU. First, the TRIPP (Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity) Implementation Framework (TIF) was officially signed and released in Washington, D.C., on January 13-14, 2026. It envisages establishment of TRIPP Development Company—an Armenian-American joint venture, registered in Armenia to manage the transit infrastructure. The US will hold a 74% stake (for financial investment), while Armenia will hold a 26% stake (contributing development rights and land). To ensure efficiency without compromising sovereignty, private operators (Front Office) will handle customer service and fee collection, while Armenian state officials (Back Office) retain exclusive authority over final customs decisions, inspections, and enforcement. The project includes the development of railways, roads, oil and gas pipelines, and digital fiber-optic systems. Construction is expected to begin in the second half of 2026. And finally, the agreement grants development rights for an initial 49-year term, with an option to extend for another 50 years.

On the same day, at the 15th Security Forum titled Armenia and Peace: At the Intersection of Risks and Opportunities, organized by the Armenian Institute of International and Security Affairs in Yerevan, the Prime Minister of Armenia, presenting the signed framework and the unprecedented security environment for it to EU and US partners, emphasized the importance of not only US efforts, but also the EU's contribution to the stabilization of the region and unblocking communication routes. Stressing the importance of the EU bill adopted last year by parliament, which launched Armenia's EU membership process, he highlighted the Armenian government's position: the country wants to become an EU member state "unequivocally and without question", and to that end "we must proceed in a very firm and clear manner along the path of transforming Armenia into a country that meets EU standards. When we meet the standards, we have two options: either we are accepted as an EU member, or we are not". He also added that in either case, Armenia benefits: in one scenario, it becomes a full EU member; in the other, it may not join, but it still becomes a modern state aligned with European standards<sup>86</sup>.

## STRATEGIC CONCLUSIONS

In broad terms and in summary, the Washington Agreements and the *Peace Agenda*, Crossroads of Peace, and TRIPP initiatives undertaken under US auspices:

- are intended to transform and replace the risk-laden paradigms and discourses that had rendered the region explosive or had repeatedly led to "explosions";
- are capable of eliminating the deadlocks that had arisen between competing mediations, connectivity projects and initiatives of different power centers, cyclically resulting in human, territorial, and material tragedies;
- promise to transform a zero-sum game into a positive-sum game for all, ensuring maximum inclusiveness and participation.

Such risk-laden paradigms and discourses, the deadlocks of mutually isolating and mutually exclusive initiatives and programs, and the zero-sum game in the Caucasus had been developing not only for Armenia but for almost all actors, continuing to bear the imprint of the Second Karabakh War of 2020, followed by the Russia-Ukraine war and other instabilities in adjacent regions.

<sup>86</sup> *Armenia unequivocally wants to become EU member, says Pashinyan*, Armenpress, 14.01.2026

TRIPP and the Crossroads of Peace were initially put forward by Armenia to reduce the risks of a new large-scale war in the region and within the framework of the new paradigm adopted for foreign and domestic security policies. At the heart of all this are Armenia's deep disappointments and fundamental lessons learned from the completely opposite paradigm adopted in past decades, from miscalculations and strategic orientations, and from the dramatic developments that have unfolded.

First, as a result of American-European cooperation, and then under US leadership, the institutionalization of agreed principles in the form of the Washington Agreements has opened a new perspective not only for Armenia and the entire region, but also for the EU, to connect with the markets of the Gulf region, the Indian Ocean, Central Asia, and Far Asia through unblocked routes.

The Strategic Partnership Charter of 14 January 2025, together with the three Memoranda of 8 August 2025, forms an integrated package of commitments that complements broader international obligations, including those undertaken within the U.S.–Armenia–Azerbaijan trilateral framework and the Armenia–Azerbaijan bilateral process. Collectively, these instruments provide a structured roadmap for implementation while extending U.S. guarantees and strategic support for Armenia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and internationally recognized borders within a bilateral Armenian–American framework.

The realization of the Crossroads of Peace initiative and its TRIPP component requires comprehensive modernization of Armenia's political, economic, legal, border, customs, transport, and educational systems. The strategic goals declared in the Armenian-American package of agreements and the actions to achieve them, including those related to TRIPP and the Crossroads of Peace, open up such a huge spectrum and field for the modernization and transformation of Armenia that it is difficult to imagine all of this without the participation and involvement of the EU.

Even amidst the crisis in relations between the US and Europe, Armenia, as the only country in the region with clear democratic and pro-European aspirations, is gaining a strategic importance as a platform for exceptional cooperation and synchronicity for Washington and Brussels.

At the background of visible regional unblocking, Armenia will gain access to new markets, integrate into West–East and North-South transport corridors, increase trade flows, and position itself within global supply chains. Enhanced regional interdependence—particularly in trade, energy, and advanced technologies—would strengthen both economic development and regional security, enabling Armenia to emerge as a competitive actor in energy, semiconductor, and artificial intelligence production and export.

Considering that American and European connectivity projects necessarily have higher standards and emphasized technological, digital, and value/democratic dimensions, it is Armenia and its projects that allow Brussels and Washington to project all of this onto the emerging transport corridor and counterbalance similar competing initiatives.

Both initiatives, along with developments in the wider region, have significantly changed the behavior of actors in recent months. All key and secondary actors are repositioning themselves around the old axis and new segments of the new route, considering the prospects of joining or engaging with it, and taking advantage of it. In the absence of inclusiveness and fair balancing and calibration, elements of concern, jealousy, caution, and even threat become visible in the positioning of some actors. The relatively best solutions for mitigating such risks are offered by the Armenian Peace Crossroads in combination with TRIPP, which is the most inclusive in the current realities.

The two initiatives, taken together, imply significant revisions to the well-known corridor projects that stretch both west-east and north-south, however for now, they still keep the game in the competitive field and provide opportunities for adaptation and integration for everyone. Without the Crossroads of Peace initiative, TRIPP, as a mere link in the old West-East transport corridor, is capable of marginalizing some and generating risks from actors whose routes or initiatives are altered or jeopardized by that segment.

The two US-supported and interrelated initiatives largely align with the EU's strategic objectives and programs in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Thanks to them, the EU's transport and connectivity megaprojects gain greater operational capabilities, especially since Brussels has made significant investments in this direction over the past decades.

Without underestimating the formation of effective interdependencies in strengthening regional peace, the foundations of its durability and continuity lie in the value field. In this regard, the importance of Armenia as a country striving for democracy and Europeanization is once again emphasized, as a new center of gravity for a profound change in the immediate neighborhood, just as Georgia once was for the societies of neighboring undemocratic countries.

All of this also takes on greater significance in the context of communication projects, since in Armenia's immediate neighborhood or in the behavior of the countries that make up the corridors, pragmatic interests predominate, moreover, their inclination and orientation is more towards the models of non-democratic actors and their projects. Therefore, Armenia is an opportunity and a channel to transform all of this, especially when international trade, inter alia, is also about value exchange through people-to-people contact.

No matter how profound the current developments, the factors and accelerators that have shaped the new paradigms of Armenia's security policy are, no matter how positive the recorded dynamics are in the wider region, all this does not yet create guarantees of absolute irreversibility, especially with the presence of actors who pursue forceful, coercive strategies, and/or are interested in reversing the processes.

From this perspective, the institutionalization of the peace architecture, the completion of unfinished processes, in the form of the unconditional and final signing and ratification of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Treaty, the rapid and complete demarcation of the border and, through it, the final addressing of all problems on the ground in the near-border zones in order to exclude new escalations, the normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations and the full opening of the border, the strengthening of Armenia's resilience, and the major international, primarily European, involvement in the announced projects remain imperative, where the EU and its member states have a major role and work to do.

Armenia's new state-building in line with European and democratic standards remains the biggest homework for official Yerevan, Armenian society, and all actors committed to this cause.

Thus, the comprehensive analysis of the Washington Agreements, the Crossroads of Peace, and the TRIPP project underscores a systemic shift in the South Caucasus—moving from a “zero-sum” conflict model to a “positive-sum” integration model.

#### In brief, they imply:

- **Paradigm Shift:** The 2025 Washington Agreements have effectively replaced explosive, risk-laden regional discourses with a structured roadmap. This transition aims to end the cycle of “territorial and material tragedies” by aligning the interests of global power centers.
- **Armenian Modernization:** The implementation of the **Crossroads of Peace** serves as a catalyst for the total transformation of Armenia's political, legal, and economic systems. This modernization is inextricably linked to U.S. strategic guarantees and EU institutional alignment.
- **Regional Inclusiveness:** Unlike previous “exclusive” corridor projects, the TRIPP-Crossroads combination minimizes the risk of marginalizing regional neighbors (like Iran or Georgia). By ensuring broad participation, Armenia reduces the incentive for “spoiler” interventions by dissatisfied actors.
- **Value-Based Connectivity:** Armenia's democratic and pro-European aspirations provide a unique “center of gravity.” This allows Washington and Brussels to project Western technological and regulatory standards onto the emerging West-East and North-South transport corridors.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### For the Government of Armenia:

- 1. Accelerate Domestic Reform:** Prioritize the “homework” of state-building by aligning customs, border, and transport regulations with **European and democratic standards** to ensure seamless integration with the Global Gateway.
- 2. Institutionalize Peace:** Pursue the unconditional signing and ratification of the **Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Treaty** and complete the **border demarcation** process to remove pretexts for military escalation.
- 3. Diversify Partnerships:** Continue to present the “Crossroads of Peace” as an inclusive platform to Iran and Georgia, providing them with technical clarifications to transform their “standby” or “hostile” caution into active participation.

### For the European Union and Member States:

- 1. Increase Strategic Investment:** Act as the “mutually determined third party” in the **TRIPP** project. Direct Global Gateway funds toward the modernization of the Armenian rail network, specifically the sections currently under-invested in by the Russian concession.
- 2. Support Resilience:** Strengthen Armenia’s socio-economic and security resilience through the Strategic Agenda signed in December 2025, focusing on visa liberalization and defense cooperation to anchor Armenia firmly in the European family, transforming its observation mission into broader presence and engagement.
- 3. Diplomatic Mediation:** Maintain pressure on the **normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations**, advocating for the full opening of the border without preconditions to ensure the Middle Corridor’s viability.

### For the United States:

- 1. Maintain Strategic Guarantees:** Uphold the commitments of the August 8, 2025, Accords and Memoranda, providing the diplomatic “umbrella” necessary for Armenia to assert sovereignty over its transit routes.
- 2. Continuous Brokering:** Maintaining the pace of Armenia–Turkey and Armenia–Azerbaijan relations while excluding the policy of preconditions.
- 3. Calibrate Regional Interests:** Close partnership with the EU in anchoring strategic projects through value-based and Western technological components, continue to synchronize with India to integrate the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) with the TRIPP project, creating a high-tech, democratic alternative to competing autocratic routes.

As the slogan of the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative proclaims, it appears that not only Armenia, but the entire region is now ready for the new chapter.

## ENDNOTES

**a Note** The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a Russia-led intergovernmental military alliance, consisting of six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. The Collective Security Treaty has its origins in the Soviet Armed Forces, which was replaced in 1992 by the United Armed Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and was then itself replaced by the successor armed forces of the respective independent states. Former members of the CSTO military alliance were Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan. Similar to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) establishes that an aggression against one signatory would be perceived as an aggression against all. The 2002 CSTO charter reaffirmed the desire of all participating states to abstain from the use or threat of force. Signatories are prohibited from joining other military alliances.

**b Note** The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a Russia-led intergovernmental military alliance, consisting of six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. The Collective Security Treaty has its origins in the Soviet Armed Forces, which was replaced in 1992 by the United Armed Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and was then itself replaced by the successor armed forces of the respective independent states. Former members of the CSTO military alliance were Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan. Similar to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) establishes that an aggression against one signatory would be perceived as an aggression against all. The 2002 CSTO charter reaffirmed the desire of all participating states to abstain from the use or threat of force. Signatories are prohibited from joining other military alliances.

**c Note:** The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline is a crude oil pipeline with a length of 1,768 km (1,099 miles), transporting oil from the Azeri–Chirag–Gunashli oil field in the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, via Georgia, thus connecting the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku, with the port of Ceyhan on Turkey’s south-eastern Mediterranean coast. The consortium, comprising 11 energy companies from the United Kingdom, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Norway, Turkey, Italy, France, Japan, the United States and India, was established in 2002. Construction of the pipeline took place in 2003–2005, and full operation commenced in the summer of 2006, with the British company BP acting as operator. Its maximum capacity is 1 million barrels per day, or 160,000 m<sup>3</sup>.

**d Note:** TRACECA (the Europe–Caucasus–Asia Transport Corridor) is an international transport program established in Brussels in 1993, involving 14 countries from the European Union, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and EU Member States Bulgaria and Romania. Iran joined the initiative in 2009. Mongolia has been an observer since 1996, Lithuania since 2009, and Greece since 2018. The program aims to strengthen economic relations, trade and transport in the Black Sea basin, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Its permanent secretariat, funded by the European Commission, is located in Baku, with a regional office in Odesa, Ukraine. TRACECA operates five working groups: maritime transport, aviation, road and rail transport, transport security, and transport infrastructure.

**e Note:** INOGATE was an EU-funded international energy cooperation program for the interstate transportation of oil and gas to Europe, involving the European Union on the one hand and the coastal states of the Black and Caspian Seas and their neighbouring countries on the other. It operated from 1996 to 2016 with 11 partner countries across three regions: in Eastern Europe: Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine (secretariat in Kyiv); in the Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (secretariat in Tbilisi); in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (secretariat in Tashkent). The program’s declared objectives were to reduce partner countries’ dependence on imports of fossil fuels and energy resources, enhance energy supply security, and mitigate global climate change.

**f Note:** The Organization of Turkic States (OTS), formerly known as the Turkic Council or the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, is an intergovernmental organization comprising the Turkic-speaking sovereign states of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan, Hungary, and Northern Cyprus (recognized only by Turkey) hold observer status. The idea of establishing the organisation was proposed in 2006 by the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. The founding members were Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey.

**g Note:** China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is structured around six main economic corridors serving as the basis for land and maritime connectivity between China and the rest of the world:

1. The New Eurasian Land Bridge (NELB), which connects China's coastal cities (such as Lianyungang) with Western Europe (Rotterdam and Antwerp) by international rail links via Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland and Germany.
2. The China–Mongolia–Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC), focused on transport infrastructure and trade, envisaging two main routes: one through Mongolia to Russia, and another through north-eastern China to Chita in Russia.
3. The China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC), which follows the route of the ancient Silk Road, starting in Xinjiang, passing through five Central Asian countries and 17 West Asian countries, and ultimately reaching the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Peninsula.
4. The China–Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC), linking southern China with the ASEAN region, including Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia and Singapore; key projects include the China–Laos railway.
5. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), connecting Kashgar in Xinjiang with the port of Gwadar in Pakistan, and comprising networks of highways, railways and pipelines.
6. The Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC), aimed at linking the markets of South and South-East Asia.

**h Note:** The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a 7,200 km (4,500-mile) multimodal network comprising maritime, rail and road routes for freight transportation between Azerbaijan, Central Asia, Europe, India, Iran and Russia. The route primarily involves the movement of cargo from India, Iran, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation by sea, rail and road. The corridor aims to increase trade connectivity between major cities such as Mumbai, Moscow, Tehran, Baku, Bandar Abbas, Astrakhan, Bandar Anzali and others. In 2014, two pilot "dry runs" were conducted: the first from Mumbai to Baku via Bandar Abbas, and the second from Mumbai to Astrakhan via Bandar Abbas, Tehran and Bandar Anzali, in order to identify key challenges and assess economic feasibility. The results showed a reduction in transport costs of USD 2,500 for a 15-tonne cargo. Other routes under discussion along the expanded corridor in the Caspian basin include those passing through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in Central Asia. In its Middle Eastern projection, the INSTC is synchronized with the Ashgabat Multimodal Transport Agreement signed by India (2018), Oman (2011), Iran (2011), Turkmenistan (2011), Uzbekistan (2011) and Kazakhstan (2015), facilitating the transport of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. At present, the project involves 13 member states (India, Iran, Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Ukraine and Syria) and one observer state (Bulgaria).

**i Note:** The Trans-Afghan project is a railway line that begins from Termez, located on the southern border of Uzbekistan, and after crossing the Amu River enters Afghanistan. Within Afghanistan, two routes have been proposed for this project: The western route, known as the Kandahar Corridor, starts from Mazar-i-Sharif, heads toward Herat, and continues through Delaram and Kandahar before reaching Pakistan, where it connects to the Chaman border. The southern route, known as the Kabul Corridor, also begins from Mazar-i-Sharif, crosses through the Hindu Kush mountains via Logar Province near Kabul, extends to Paktia Province, and from there connects to the Kharlachi (dry) port in Pakistan. The length of this railway is estimated between 740 to 781 kilometers, making it the shortest route between Uzbekistan in Central Asia and Pakistan in South Asia. A trilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed among the governments of Uzbekistan, Pakistan and the Taliban.

**j Note:** India-Iran-Afghanistan trade route. India, Afghanistan and Iran decided in 2016 to establish the trade route, which would allow Indian goods to reach Central Asia. India committed up to \$500 million for the development of the Chabahar port, along with roads and rail lines. Initially it was aimed at strengthening economic ties between the three nations and serves as a counterbalance to the China-developed Gwadar port in Pakistan. The project implied connecting the Chabahar port to the Zaranj-Delaram highway in Afghanistan.

**k Note:** Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is a landmark treaty between the European Union and Armenia, signed in 2017 and fully in force since March 1, 2021. It strengthens political and economic ties, focusing on democracy, rule of law, trade, and sectoral cooperation.

# «ԹՐԱՄՓԻ ՈՒՂԻ՝ ՀԱՆՈՒՆ ՄԻՋԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ ԽԱՂԱՂՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԵՎ ԲԱՐԳԱՎԱՃՄԱՆ» ԵՎ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ

**«ԽԱՂԱՂՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԽԱՉՄԵՐՈՒԿ»**  
ՆԱԽԱՁԵՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ .ՏԱՐԱԾԱՇՐՋԱՆԱՅԻ  
Ն ՀԵՏԵՎԱՆՔՆԵՐՆ ՈՒ ՄԱՐՏԱՀՐԱՎԵՐՆԵՐԸ

**«ԹՐԱՄՓԻ ՈՒՂԻ՝ ՀԱՆՈՒՆ  
ՄԻՋԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ ԽԱՂԱՂՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԵՎ  
ԲԱՐԳԱՎԱՃՄԱՆ» ԵՎ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ  
«ԽԱՂԱՂՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԽԱՉՄԵՐՈՒԿ»  
ՆԱԽԱԶԵՌՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ.  
ՏԱՐԱԾԱՇՐՋԱՆԱՅԻՆ  
ՀԵՏԵՎԱՆՔՆԵՐՆ ՈՒ  
ՄԱՐՏԱՀՐԱՎԵՐՆԵՐԸ**

**ՀԵՏԱԶՈՏԱԿԱՆ ԱՇԽԱՏԱՆՔ**  
հեղինակ՝ Ստյոպա (Ստեփան) Սաֆարյան

## ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Սույն հետազոտությունը քննության է առնում Հայաստանի «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկ» նախաձեռնության տարածաշրջանային հետևանքներն ու մարտահրավերները TRIPP-ի (Թրամփի ուղի) շրջանակներում՝ 2025 թվականի Հայաստան-Ադրբեջան խաղաղության համաձայնություններով վերափոխված աշխարհաքաղաքական լանդշաֆտի համատեքստում:

Աշխատության հիմնական նպատակներն են՝ հետազոտել նախաձեռնության ռազմավարական հիմքերը և վերլուծել դրանց տնտեսական, անվտանգային ու աշխարհաքաղաքական ազդեցությունները Հայաստանի, Հարավային Կովկասի և Եվրոպական միության վրա: Վեր հանելով առանցքային ռիսկերն ու ինստիտուցիոնալ նախապայմանները՝ աշխատությունն առաջարկում է Հայաստանի կապուղիների տեսլականը նրա ազգային զարգացման առաջնահերթություններին և միջազգային պարտավորություններին համապատասխանեցնելու հանձնարարականներ:

Վերլուծությունը հիմնված է «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկ» և TRIPP նախաձեռնությունների հիմքում ընկած կարգավորող իրավական շրջանակների և պարտավորությունների համապարփակ ուսումնասիրության վրա, որոնք գնահատվել են վերջին 30 տարվա տարածաշրջանային զարգացումների լույսի ներքո: Բացի այդ, սույն հետազոտությունը հենվում է լայնածավալ ոչ պաշտոնական քննարկումների, այդ թվում՝ բարձրաստիճան պաշտոնյաների և դիվանագետների հետ անանունության պայմանով անցկացված խորհրդապահական գրույցների վրա:

Լայն առումով և հանրագումարում, ԱՄՆ հովանու ներքո նախաձեռնված Վաշինգտոնյան համաձայնագրերը և «Խաղաղության օրակարգ», «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկ» ու TRIPP նախաձեռնությունները՝

- կոչված են վերափոխել այն ռիսկաշատ հարացույցերը (պարադիգմ) ու խոսույթները (դիսկուրս), որոնք տարածաշրջանը դարձրել էին պայթյունավտանգ կամ բազմիցս հանգեցրել էին «պայթյունների»,
- ունակ են վերացնել տարբեր ուժային կենտրոնների մրցակցային միջնորդությունների, կապուղիների նախագծերի և նախաձեռնությունների միջև առաջացած փակուղիները, որոնք ցիկլիկորեն հանգեցնում էին մարդկային, տարածքային և նյութական ողբերգությունների,
- խոստանում են զրոյական գումարով խաղը վերածել բոլորի համար դրական գումարով խաղի՝ ապահովելով առավելագույն ներառականություն և մասնակցություն:

Այս նախաձեռնությունները դիտարկվում են որպես տարածաշրջանում նոր ճգնաժամերի ռիսկերը նվազեցնելու միջոց և հանդիսանում են Հայաստանի արտաքին ու ներքին անվտանգության նոր ռազմավարության մաս: Դրանք հիմնված են նախորդ տասնամյակների զարգացումների վերլուծության և տարածաշրջանային կայունության հաստատման անհրաժեշտության վրա:

Նման ռիսկաշատ հարացույցերն ու խոսույթները, փոխադարձաբար մեկուսացնող և փոխբացառող նախաձեռնությունների ու ծրագրերի փակուղիները, ինչպես նաև Կովկասում զրոյական գումարով խաղը զարգանում էին ոչ միայն Հայաստանի, այլև գրեթե բոլոր դերակատարների համար՝ շարունակելով կրել 2020 թվականի Երկրորդ Ղարաբաղյան պատերազմի կնիքը, որին հաջորդեցին Ռուսաստան-Ուկրաինա պատերազմը և այլ անկայունություններ հարակից տարածաշրջաններում:

TRIPP-ը և «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկն» ի սկզբանե Հայաստանի կողմից առաջ են քաշվել տարածաշրջանում նոր լայնածավալ պատերազմի ռիսկերը նվազեցնելու նպատակով և արտաքին ու ներքին անվտանգության քաղաքականության համար ընդունված նոր հարացույցի շրջանակներում: Այս ամենի հիմքում ընկած են Հայաստանի խորը հիասթափությունները և հիմնարար դասերը, որոնք քաղվել են անցյալ տասնամյակներում ընդունված բոլորովին հակառակ հարացույցից, սխալ հաշվարկներից և ռազմավարական կողմնորոշումներից, ինչպես նաև տեղի ունեցած դրամատիկ զարգացումներից:

### Ի գիտություն՝

Սույն հրապարակումը պատվիրվել է Բազմակուսակցական ժողովրդավարության Արևելաեվրոպական կենտրոնի (EECMD) կողմից՝ Դանիայի սոցիալ-լիբերալ կուսակցության և Կուսակցությունների և ժողովրդավարության դանիական ինստիտուտի (DIPD) կողմից ֆինանսավորվող ծրագրի շրջանակում: Հրապարակման բովանդակությունն ու արտահայտված կարծիքները բացառապես հեղինակի պատասխանատվության ներքո են և չեն արտահայտում EECMD-ի կամ դրա դոնոր կազմակերպությունների տեսակետները:

Նախ, ամերիկա-եվրոպական համագործակցության արդյունքում, այնուհետև ԱՄՆ առաջնորդությամբ համաձայնեցված սկզբունքների ինստիտուցիոնալացումը Վաշինգտոնյան համաձայնագրերի տեսքով նոր հեռանկար է բացել ոչ միայն Հայաստանի և ամբողջ տարածաշրջանի, այլև ԵՄ-ի համար՝ չարգելափակված ճանապարհներով կապվելու Ծոցի տարածաշրջանի, Հնդկական օվկիանոսի, Կենտրոնական Ասիայի և Հեռավոր Ասիայի շուկաների հետ:

2025 թ. հունվարի 14-ի ԱՄՆ-Հայաստան Ռազմավարական գործընկերության կանոնադրությունը՝ 2025 թ. օգոստոսի 8-ին ստորագրված երեք հուշագրերի հետ մեկտեղ, ձևավորում է հանձնառությունների միասնական, ինտեգրված փաթեթ, որը փոխընդունում է ավելի լայն միջազգային պարտավորությունները, ներառյալ՝ ԱՄՆ-Հայաստան-Ադրբեջան եռակողմ ձևաչափի և Հայաստան-Ադրբեջան երկկողմ գործընթացի շրջանակներում ստանձնածները: Հավաքականորեն այդ բոլոր գործիքներն ապահովում են իրականացման կառուցվածքային ճանապարհային քարտեզ՝ միաժամանակ ԱՄՆ երաշխիքներն ու ռազմավարական աջակցությունը հայ-ամերիկյան երկկողմ հարաբերությունների շրջանակում տարածելով Հայաստանի ինքնիշխանության, տարածքային ամբողջականության և միջազգայնորեն ճանաչված սահմանների վրա:

«Խաղաղության խաչմերուկ» նախաձեռնության և դրա TRIPP (Թրամփի ուղի) բաղադրիչի իրականացումը պահանջում է Հայաստանի քաղաքական, տնտեսական, իրավական, սահմանային, մաքսային, տրանսպորտային և կրթական համակարգերի համապարփակ արդիականացում: Հայ-ամերիկյան համաձայնագրերի փաթեթում հռչակված ռազմավարական նպատակները և դրանց ձեռքբերմանն ուղղված գործողությունները, այդ թվում՝ TRIPP-ին և «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկին» վերաբերողները, Հայաստանի արդիականացման և վերափոխման այնպիսի հսկայական սպեկտր և դաշտ են բացում, որ այդ ամենը դժվար է պատկերացնել առանց Եվրոպական միության մասնակցության և ներգրավվածության:

Անգամ ԱՄՆ-ի և Եվրոպայի միջև հարաբերությունների ճգնաժամի պայմաններում Հայաստանը՝ որպես տարածաշրջանում հստակ ժողովրդավարական և եվրոպամետ ձգտումներով միակ երկիր, ձեռք է բերում ռազմավարական նշանակություն որպես Վաշինգտոնի և Բրյուսելի բացառիկ համագործակցության և գործողությունների համաժամանակեցման (սինխրոնիզացիայի) հարթակ:

Պատկերացող տարածաշրջանային ապաշրջափակման խորապատկերին Հայաստանը հնարավորություն կստանա մուտք գործել նոր շուկաներ, ինտեգրվել Արևելք-Արևմուտք և Հյուսիս-Հարավ տրանսպորտային միջանցքներին, ավելացնել առևտրային հոսքերը և դիրքավորվել (տեղ գրադեցնել) համաշխարհային մատակարարման շղթաներում: Տարածաշրջանային փոխկախվածության մեծացումը, հատկապես առևտրի, էներգետիկայի և առաջադեմ տեխնոլոգիաների ոլորտներում, կամրապնդի թե՛ տնտեսական զարգացումը, թե՛ տարածաշրջանային անվտանգությունը՝ հնարավորություն տալով Հայաստանին հանդես գալ որպես մրցունակ դերակատար էներգետիկայի, կիսահաղորդիչների և արհեստական բանականության արտադրության ու արտահանման ոլորտներում:

Հաշվի առնելով, որ ամերիկյան և եվրոպական հաղորդակցային նախագծերը պարտադրաբար ունեն ավելի բարձր չափանիշներ և ընդգծված տեխնոլոգիական, թվային ու արժեքային/ժողովրդավարական չափումներ՝ հենց Հայաստանն ու նրա նախագծերն են թույլ տալիս Բրյուսելին և Վաշինգտոնին այդ ամենը արտապատկերել ձևավորվող տրանսպորտային միջանցքի վրա և հավասարակշռել նմանատիպ մրցակից նախաձեռնությունները:

Տարածաշրջանային ավելի լայն զարգացումների հետ մեկտեղ երկու նախաձեռնություններն էլ վերջին ամիսներին զգալիորեն փոխել են դերակատարների վարքագիծը: Բոլոր առանցքային և երկրորդական դերակատարները վերադասավորվում են հին առանցքի և նոր երթուղու նոր հատվածների շուրջ՝ դիտարկելով դրանց միանալու, ներգրավվելու և ընձեռած հնարավորություններից օգտվելու հեռանկարներ: Ներառականության, ինչպես նաև արդար հավասարակշռման ու չափաբերման բացակայության դեպքում որոշ դերակատարների դիրքավորման մեջ նկատելի են դառնում մտահոգության, նախանձի, զգուշավորության և նույնիսկ սպառնալիքի տարրեր: Նման ռիսկերի

մեղմման համար համեմատաբար լավագույն լուծումներն առաջարկում է հայկական «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկը»՝ TRIPP-ի հետ համակցված, որն առկա իրողություններում ամենաներառականն է:

Միասին վերցրած այս երկու նախաձեռնությունները զգալի վերանայումներ են ենթադրում թե՛ արևմուտք-արևելք, թե՛ հյուսիս-հարավ ուղղություններով ձգվող հայտնի միջանցքային նախագծերում, սակայն առաջմ դրանք խաղը պահում են մրցակցային դաշտում և բոլորի համար հարմարվելու ու ինտեգրվելու հնարավորություններ են ընձեռում: Առանց «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկ» նախաձեռնության TRIPP-ը, որպես Արևմուտք-Արևելք հին տրանսպորտային միջանցքի սոսկ մի օղակ, ընդունակ է լուսանցք մղել ոմանց և ռիսկեր հարուցել այն դերակատարների կողմից, որոնց երթուղիները կամ նախաձեռնությունները փոփոխվում կամ վտանգվում են այդ հատվածի պատճառով:

ԱՄՆ-ի կողմից աջակցվող և փոխկապակցված այս երկու նախաձեռնությունները մեծապես համահունչ են Հարավային Կովկասում և Կենտրոնական Ասիայում ԵՄ ռազմավարական նպատակներին ու ծրագրերին: Դրանց շնորհիվ ԵՄ տրանսպորտային և հաղորդակցային մեզանախագծերը ձեռք են բերում ավելի մեծ գործառնական հնարավորություններ, հատկապես հաշվի առնելով, որ Բրյուսելը վերջին տասնամյակների ընթացքում զգալի ներդրումներ է կատարել այս ուղղությամբ:

Առանց նվազեցնելու արդյունավետ փոխկախվածությունների ձևավորման դերը տարածաշրջանային խաղաղության ամրապնդման գործում, դրա տևականության և շարունակականության հիմքերը գտնվում են արժեքային դաշտում: Այս առումով վերստին ընդգծվում է Հայաստանի կարևորությունը որպես ժողովրդավարության և եվրոպականացման ձգտող երկիր և իր անմիջական հարևանության խորքային փոփոխությունների ձգողականության նոր կենտրոն, ինչպիսին ժամանակին Վրաստանն էր հարևան ոչ ժողովրդավարական երկրների հասարակությունների համար:

Այս ամենը նաև առավել մեծ նշանակություն է ձեռք բերում հաղորդակցային նախագծերի համատեքստում, քանի որ Հայաստանի անմիջական հարևանության մեջ կամ միջանցքները ձևավորող երկրների վարքագծում գերակշռում են պրագմատիկ շահերը. ավելին՝ նրանց հակվածությունն ու կողմնորոշումն ավելի շատ դեպի ոչ ժողովրդավարական դերակատարների մոդելներն ու նրանց նախագծերն են: Հետևաբար, Հայաստանը հնարավորություն և խողովակ է այդ ամենը վերափոխելու համար, հատկապես երբ միջազգային առևտուրը, ի թիվս այլնի, նաև մարդկային շփումների միջոցով իրականացվող արժեքային փոխանակման մասին է:

Անկախ նրանից, թե որքան խորն են ներկայիս զարգացումները, գործոններն ու արագացուցիչները, որոնք ձևավորել են Հայաստանի անվտանգության քաղաքականության նոր հարացույցերը, և անկախ նրանից, թե որքան դրական է արձանագրված դինամիկան լայն տարածաշրջանում, այս ամենը դեռևս չի ստեղծում բացարձակ անշրջելիության երաշխիքներ, հատկապես այնպիսի դերակատարների առկայության պայմաններում, որոնք վարում են ուժային, հարկադրող ռազմավարություններ և/կամ շահագրգռված են գործընթացները ետ շրջելու հարցում:

Այս տեսանկյունից հրամայական են մնում խաղաղության ճարտարապետության ինստիտուցիոնալացումը, անավարտ գործընթացները վերջնահանգրվանին հասցնելն ի դեմս Հայաստան-Ադրբեջան խաղաղության պայմանագրի՝ առանց նախապայմանների, անվերապահ ու վերջնական ստորագրման և վավերացման, նոր էսկալացիաները բացառելու նպատակով սահմանի արագ և ամբողջական սահմանազատումը և դրա միջոցով մերձսահմանային գոտիներում «գետնի վրա» բոլոր խնդիրների վերջնական հասցեագրումը, Հայաստան-Թուրքիա հարաբերությունների կարգավորումն ու սահմանի լիակատար բացումը, Հայաստանի դիմակայունության ամրապնդումը և միջազգային, նախևառաջ եվրոպական մեծ ներգրավվածությունը հայտարարված նախագծերում, որտեղ ԵՄ-ն և նրա անդամ երկրները ունեն մեծ դերակատարում և անելիք:

Եվրոպական և ժողովրդավարական չափանիշներին համապատասխանող Հայաստանի նոր պետականաշինությունը մնում է ամենամեծ «տնային աշխատանքը» պաշտոնական Երևանի, հայ հասարակության և այս գործին հանձնառու բոլոր դերակատարների համար:

Այսպիսով, Վաշինգտոնյան համաձայնագրերի, «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկի» և TRIPP նախագծի համապարփակ վերլուծությունն ընդգծում է Հարավային Կովկասում համակարգային տեղաշարժը՝

անցում կատարելով «զրոյական գումարով» (zero-sum) հակամարտ մոդելից դեպի «դրական գումարով» (positive-sum) ինտեգրման մոդելի:

**Հակիրճ՝ դրանք ենթադրում են.**

- **Հարացույցի փոփոխություն.** 2025 թվականի Վաշինգտոնյան համաձայնագրերը տարածաշրջանային պայթյունավտանգ ու ռիսկաշատ խոսույթներն արդյունավետորեն փոխարինել են կառուցվածքային ճանապարհային քարտեզով: Այս անցումը նպատակ ունի վերջ դնել տարածքային և նյութական ողբերգությունների շրջափուլին՝ համադրելով համաշխարհային ուժային կենտրոնների շահերը:
- **Հայաստանի արդիականացում.** «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկի» իրականացումը ծառայում է որպես կատալիզատոր Հայաստանի քաղաքական, իրավական և տնտեսական համակարգերի ամբողջական վերափոխման համար: Այդ արդիականացումն անխզելիորեն կապված է ԱՄՆ ռազմավարական երաշխիքների և ԵՄ ինստիտուցիոնալ համադրման, համապատասխանեցման հետ:
- **Տարածաշրջանային ներառականություն.** Ի տարբերություն նախկին «բացառիկ» միջանցքային նախագծերի, TRIPP-«Խաղաղության խաչմերուկ» համակցությունը նվազեցնում է տարածաշրջանային հարևանների (ինչպիսիք են Իրանը կամ Վրաստանը) լուսանցքայնացման ռիսկը: Ապահովելով լայն մասնակցություն՝ Հայաստանը նվազեցնում է դժգոհ դերակատարների կողմից «խաթարող» միջամտությունների խթանիչները:
- **Արժեքահեն հաղորդակցություն.** Հայաստանի ժողովրդավարական և եվրոպամետ ձգտումներն ապահովում են եզակի «ձգողականության կենտրոն»: Սա թույլ է տալիս Վաշինգտոնին և Բրյուսելին արևմտյան տեխնոլոգիական և կարգավորող չափանիշները արտապատկերել ձևավորվող Արևելք-Արևմուտք և Հյուսիս-Հարավ տրանսպորտային միջանցքների վրա:

**Քաղաքականության հանձնարարականներ**

**Հայաստանի կառավարության համար.**

- **Արագացնել ներքին բարեփոխումները.** առաջնահերթություն տալ պետականաշինության «տնային աշխատանքին»՝ մաքսային, սահմանային և տրանսպորտային կանոնակարգերը համապատասխանեցնելով եվրոպական և ժողովրդավարական չափանիշներին՝ ապահովելու համար «Գլոբալ դարպաս» նախագծին անխափան ինտեգրումը:
- **Ինստիտուցիոնալացնել խաղաղությունը.** հասնել Հայաստան-Ադրբեջան խաղաղության պայմանագրի առանց նախապայմանների ստորագրմանն ու վավերացմանը և ավարտին հասցնել սահմանազատման գործընթացը՝ ռազմական էսկալացիայի համար հիմք հանդիսացող պատրվակները վերացնելու նպատակով:

- **Բազմազանեցնել գործընկերությունները.** շարունակել Վրաստանին և Իրանին ներկայացնել «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկը» որպես ներառական հարթակ՝ տրամադրելով տեխնիկական պարզաբանումներ նրանց «սպասողական» կամ «թշնամական» զգուշավորությունը ակտիվ մասնակցության վերածելու համար:

**Եվրոպական միության և անդամ պետությունների համար.**

- **Ավելացնել ռազմավարական ներդրումները.** հանդես գալ որպես TRIPP նախագծի «փոխադարձաբար որոշված երրորդ կողմ»: «Գլոբալ դարպասի» միջոցներն ուղղել հայկական երկաթուղային ցանցի արդիականացմանը, հատկապես այն հատվածներին, որոնք ներկայումս թերներդրված են ռուսական կոնցեսիայի կողմից:
- **Աջակցել դիմակայունությանը.** ամրապնդել Հայաստանի սոցիալ-տնտեսական և անվտանգային դիմակայունությունը 2025 թվականի դեկտեմբերին ստորագրված Ռազմավարական գործընկերության օրակարգի միջոցով՝ կենտրոնանալով վիզաների ազատականացման և պաշտպանական համագործակցության վրա՝ Հայաստանը եվրոպական ընտանիքում ամուր խարսխելու նպատակով, և դիտորդական առաքելությունը վերափոխելով ավելի լայն ներկայության և ներգրավվածության:
- **Դիվանագիտական միջնորդությունը.** պահպանել ճնշումը Հայաստան-Թուրքիա հարաբերությունների կարգավորման ուղղությամբ՝ «Միջին միջանցքի» կենսունակության ապահովման համար հանդես գալով առանց նախապայմանների սահմանի լիակատար բացման օգտին:

**Ամերիկայի Միացյալ Նահանգների համար.**

- **Պահպանել ռազմավարական երաշխիքները.** հավատարիմ մնալ 2025 թվականի օգոստոսի 8-ի համաձայնագրերի և հուշագրերի պարտավորություններին՝ ապահովելով այն դիվանագիտական «հովանոցը», որն անհրաժեշտ է Հայաստանին իր տարանցիկ ուղիների նկատմամբ ինքնիշխանություն հաստատելու համար:
- **Շարունակական միջնորդություն.** պահպանել Հայաստան-Թուրքիա և Հայաստան-Ադրբեջան հարաբերությունների տեմպը՝ բացառելով նախապայմանների քաղաքականությունը:
- **Համադրել տարածաշրջանային շահերը.** սերտ գործընկերություն ԵՄ-ի հետ՝ ռազմավարական նախագծերը արժեքահեն և արևմտյան տեխնոլոգիական բաղադրիչներով խարսխելու հարցում, շարունակել համաժամանակեցումը (սինխրոնիզացիան) Հնդկաստանի հետ՝ «Հյուսիս-Հարավ» միջազգային տրանսպորտային միջանցքը (INSTC) TRIPP նախագծին ինտեգրելու համար՝ ստեղծելով բարձր տեխնոլոգիական, ժողովրդավարական այլընտրանք մրցակից ավտոկրատիկ երթուղիներին:

Ինչպես «Խաղաղության խաչմերուկ» նախաձեռնության կարգախոսն է հռչակում, թվում է, թե ոչ միայն Հայաստանը, այլև ողջ տարածաշրջանն այժմ **պատրաստ է** նոր էջի:

Ջեկույցի ամբողջական հայերեն տեքստը կարող եք բեռնել Բազմակուսակցական Ժողովրդավարության Արևելաեվրոպական կենտրոնի (EECMD) պաշտոնական կայքից՝ <https://eecmd.org/>

