

# Armenia's Path to European Integration: How Does Azerbaijan View It?

written by Shahin Jafarli Şahin Cəfərli

The Armenian government started 2025 by making strategic foreign policy decisions. In the first week of the new year, a draft law on starting the EU membership process was approved by the government and sent to parliament, and a Strategic Partnership Charter was signed with the US. These steps indicate that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's vision of moving his country away from Russia's sphere of influence, opening up to the world, and moving closer to Western states and institutions is beginning to take practical shape. Because the decisions of the Pashinyan government are likely to change the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan's perspective on this process is crucial, especially given its increased ambitions following the second Karabakh war.

On 9 January, the Armenian government approved and submitted to the legislature a [draft law](#) on initiating the EU membership process. Previously, on 10 December, 2024, the Central Election Commission had verified over 50.000 signatures supporting a [petition](#) to begin parliamentary debates on EU membership. This petition was prepared and submitted to the CEC as part of a civic initiative. After the draft law is passed in parliament, the Armenian government will discuss the roadmap for European integration with the European Commission. The final decision on membership at the national level must be made by the people through a referendum.

EU membership is a long-term process under normal circumstances, requiring full compliance with the Copenhagen criteria established by the EU across various fields. However, driven by the new geopolitical realities created by the

Ukraine war, the EU has increased its activity in post-Soviet space and entered unprecedented sharp competition with Russia. The EU bureaucracy has accordingly shed its traditional inertia in responding to events and moved to dynamic action. Granting candidate status to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia would not have been so easy in the pre-war period. Against the backdrop of current problems in Georgia, the EU is demonstrating its interest in the South Caucasus by seeking to intensify and deepen relations with Armenia. The EU has [stated](#) that relations with Armenia have never been closer, and the draft law being prepared will be discussed with the Armenian government. Undoubtedly, the EU's decision to send a [short-term](#) (2-month) monitoring mission to Armenia in October 2022 and then a [long-term](#) (2-year) civilian observation mission in January 2023 to monitor the border with Azerbaijan signals relations reaching a new level. The EU proposed to [extend](#) the observation mission's mandate for another 2 years.

Building security relations with the EU based on mutual trust, the Armenian government has frozen its activities in the Russia-led military bloc, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and [Pashinyan](#) has declared that returning to this organization is impossible. This shows that the alliance with Russia has effectively ended, and the current treaty-legal framework is entirely formal. Russian officials assessed Armenia's initiation of EU membership as the beginning of its [exit](#) from the Eurasian Economic Union. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk compared Armenia's EU aspirations to buying a ticket on the [Titanic](#), warning that leaving the Eurasian Economic Union would risk increasing food and energy prices and reducing exports by 70-80%. Moscow is clearly indicating to Armenia that if it proceeds toward EU membership, it will lose the preferences it receives from cooperation with the Eurasian Union and Russia. The same arguments have been repeated by [Armenian businessmen](#) connected to Russia, Samvel Karapetyan and Gagik Tsarukyan. The Armenian government has [acknowledged](#) these risks and

declared that it is not currently considering leaving the Eurasian Union.

However, it's clear that Russia, as the leading state of the Union, will make this decision, not Armenia. Considering the current state of Russia-Moldova relations (political tension, Gazprom cutting gas supplies to Moldova, etc.), we can assume that if Armenia receives EU candidate status, it may face economic sanctions from Russia, including expulsion from the Eurasian Union. Russia's position of not permitting simultaneous representation in two economic integration spaces involving the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor is correct and justified. Therefore, Armenia must choose between the two, and in fact, it has already chosen. The Pashinyan government simply intends to implement its choice when the damage and risks will be minimal, while Russia doesn't want to grant it this comfort.

### **Azerbaijan's Position**

In an interview with Dmitry Kiselev, President Ilham Aliyev [noted](#) that Armenia's distancing from the CSTO and intensifying relations with France are a direct threat to Azerbaijan. For the first time, Aliyev revealed the two unresolved articles in the peace treaty with Armenia. Azerbaijan, he revealed, wants the peace treaty to include a provision prohibiting the deployment of representatives from other countries on the border between the two countries. "Why is this important for us? Because under the guise of European observers, NATO infrastructure has been created on our border, on the Armenian side. This mission gradually transformed into a NATO mission, as Canadian representatives joined it," Aliyev emphasized. (The other unresolved article concerns mutual renunciation of international claims).

Azerbaijan considers Western observers in Armenia NATO infrastructure. Setting aside whether this this assessment is accurate, the most striking aspect of it is that Baku is

officially declaring NATO a threat for the first time. However, Azerbaijan's ally Türkiye is a NATO member, and all decisions in this military-political bloc are made by consensus. Ankara has veto power, and without its consent, the likelihood of NATO adopting any decision against Azerbaijan is nil. Azerbaijan itself has long [cooperated](#) with NATO through various programs and participated in the organization's peacekeeping missions. It's difficult to understand when and why this alliance became a threat to Azerbaijan.

On the other hand, we have previously heard the phrase "we don't want NATO infrastructure on our borders" from Russian leadership and spokespersons, and we continue to hear it. The appearance of this mantra in Azerbaijan's official rhetoric may be a result of establishing alliance relations with Russia. [The Declaration on Allied Interaction](#) includes obligations in Article 4 for Russia and Azerbaijan to maintain identical or similar positions on current international problems; in Article 5 to interact in the Caucasus and Caspian regions; and in Article 7 for parties to refrain from any actions that would harm the strategic partnership and alliance relations between the two states. Despite harsh statements made in Baku after a passenger aircraft was mistakenly shot down in Russian airspace, the current level of relations still fits within the framework outlined in these provisions. Azerbaijan isn't acting under Russian dictation; their interests simply align. Aliyev's [statement](#) to the Russian journalist that "in many aspects, our countries' foreign policy priorities coincide" confirms this.

In his interview with Azerbaijani TV channels, [Aliyev](#) presented harsh conditions to Armenia beyond the peace treaty and took a very tough stance. He stated that Armenia must immediately stop arming itself, terminate contracts signed with France and other countries regarding weapons, and return the weapons it has received; otherwise, Azerbaijan won't stand by as a mere observer. Aliyev added that Armenia should not be a geographical barrier between Türkiye and Azerbaijan,

therefore the Zangezur corridor must and will be opened. Calling Armenia a fascist state that threatens the region, he said that either the Armenian leadership must destroy this fascism, or Azerbaijan will. Declaring Azerbaijan the leader of the South Caucasus, Aliyev also hinted at the possibility of [using force](#): “I have said once, they shouldn’t irritate us and should understand that we are in charge here. Azerbaijan is the leading economy, leading military power, and leading state in the South Caucasus. In today’s world, the power factor is at the forefront, and no one should forget this.”

While Azerbaijan being the region’s leading state has always been a main thesis in government propaganda, this time the matter goes beyond internal messaging. Aliyev indicates that Azerbaijan has the final say in the South Caucasus and can intervene in matters it considers contrary to its interests in both Armenia and Georgia. For example, he [notes](#) that France should not interfere in South Caucasus issues. One day after this interview, which also included his criticism of Iran, Aliyev told the Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council that it is unacceptable for forces outside the region to be involved in the region. The phrase “forces outside the region” refers to the US and EU countries. Azerbaijan has proposed the 3+3 cooperation format for discussing and resolving regional cooperation issues. This format includes the three South Caucasus countries and neighboring states – Russia, Iran, and Türkiye. Georgia currently doesn’t participate in this format due to its problems with Russia. Commenting on the recent political events in Georgia in the Kiselev interview, Aliyev characterized it as a battle for the Caucasus: “Armenia’s direction is clear. It has de facto left the CSTO. Azerbaijan is an independent actor and is sufficiently specialized, able to defend itself. Therefore, Georgia is an important factor in the battles for the Caucasus. What will it be like? It will be based on our traditional Caucasian values.” Aliyev’s words that “we are making efforts and taking all steps to ensure that the

situation in Georgia remains stable in the political sphere” suggest that Baku is somehow supporting the Georgian government. The Azerbaijani leadership had not felt the need to hide its support for Georgian Dream during the election campaign period in Georgia either.

Baku’s view of Armenia’s strategic partnership document with the US can be clearly seen in articles in pro-government media. Three main theses stand out in these articles. First, these articles address the strategic partnership as Armenia’s betrayal of Russia and emphasize it as being directed against Iran’s interests. The articles call on both states to take measures against Armenia and criticize Moscow and Tehran’s passive reaction to this partnership. Second, they note that Armenia has become a tool in US hands and will suffer as a result. Third, they express hope that the partnership document and US-Armenia rapprochement is the position of the Biden administration, and Washington’s regional policy will change during the Trump era. Foreign Minister [Jeyhun Bayramov](#) has confidently emphasized that during the Republicans’ upcoming 4-year rule, they will see a different approach from the US, with relations between Azerbaijan and the US formed on the basis of mutual interests.

## **Conclusion**

Aliyev’s Azerbaijan demands that the EU observation mission leave Armenia; that military cooperation between Western states and Armenia involving armament be stopped; that financial allocation to Armenia from the EU’s Peace Fund be ended; and that powers outside the region – the EU and US – not interfere in South Caucasus issues. Azerbaijan considers a direct threat Armenia’s movement away from the CSTO and beginning military cooperation with France and the EU. And Baku views the tension in Georgia between the government that has delayed (effectively stopped) European integration and pro-European integration supporters not just as limited to Georgia but as a battle for the entire region. In this battle,

Azerbaijan's leadership has taken the side of Georgian Dream.

Azerbaijan opposes the West filling Russia's vacuum in Armenia. It supports Georgia's rejection of European integration and distancing from the West – which will eventually result in rapprochement with Russia. Baku believes that problems in the South Caucasus and regional cooperation issues should only be resolved within the framework of the 3+3 partnership format. The Azerbaijani leadership, which opposes EU and US intervention in the region, wants to see Western states and institutions only as partners in areas such as economics, trade, technology, and transit-logistics.