EPC Summit in Yerevan: Armenia Repositioned

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Introduction: Armenia Between Europe and Russia

Armenia's decision to host this year's European Political Community Summit in Yerevan represents one of the most symbolically significant moments in the country's contemporary foreign policy. By hosting the event, Armenia gained international recognition and showed its increasing efforts to diversify outside of Russia's sphere of influence. The summit, which took place just a few years after Armenia lost control of Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia failed to live up to Armenian security expectations, put Armenia at the

center of a continental political platform that was becoming increasingly focused on geopolitical alignment, connectivity, and regional security.

The summit's importance also emphasizes how contentious Armenia's foreign policy path has been. Armenia is nevertheless physically and economically limited by long-standing ties to Russia, especially in the energy and trade sectors, despite recent developments suggesting increased cooperation with both the US and the EU.

This brief investigates whether the European Political Community (EPC) Summit represents a recalibrated balancing strategy to prevent reliance on any one external player or a true strategic reorientation toward the West.

From Strategic Dependence to Russian Disillusionment

Since gaining independence in 1991, Armenia's security system has been closely tied to a regional order shaped by Russia. Because of its geographic isolation, the long-running conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and limited economic resources, Armenia relied heavily on Russia for economic support, military protection, and strategic balance in the region. This dependence became institutionalized through the establishment of a Russian military base in Gyumri, as well as Armenia's membership in Russian-led organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Together, these arrangements positioned Russia as Armenia's main security guarantor and a central force in maintaining regional stability for many years.

However, this strategic dependence began to weaken in the 2020s as confidence in Russian guarantees steadily declined. The first major rupture emerged during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, when Russia limited its role largely to mediation instead of direct intervention, raising serious doubts about its willingness to fulfill alliance commitments. These concerns deepened further in 2021–2022, when CSTO mechanisms failed to deliver meaningful support for Armenia's territorial integrity during repeated border clashes. The full restoration of Azerbaijan's control over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 marked another critical turning point, highlighting Russia's inability — or unwillingness — to prevent Armenia's strategic position from deteriorating further. Taken together, these developments undermined trust in Russia as a reliable security guarantor and accelerated Armenia's search for alternative foreign policy and security partnerships.

EPC Summit in Yerevan: Armenia's European Turn in Practice

Why Yerevan Was Chosen

The decision to hold the European Political Community Summit in Yerevan reflected a broader shift in how European foreign policy approaches the South Caucasus. After 2020 — and especially following Russia's war in Ukraine — Russia's role as the region's dominant security actor steadily weakened. At the same time, the EU increased its focus on alternative

connectivity corridors linking Europe with Central Asia and the South Caucasus. In this changing environment, Armenia began to be viewed less as a peripheral post-Soviet state and more as a potential strategic partner.

In this context, the decision to host the summit in Yerevan carried important symbolic and political significance. It signaled that Armenia was increasingly being integrated into wider European political discussions rather than seen only through the lens of conflict management or Russian mediation. Even without a formal membership process, the choice of venue itself suggested Armenia's growing inclusion within the broader European political space.

The EPC Summit as Strategic Political Signalling

The EPC Summit did not result in binding agreements or formal policy measures, but it produced important political and symbolic effects. Its most significant outcome was the presence of more than 40 European leaders in Yerevan, which in itself sent a strong message of political recognition.

The summit declarations repeatedly stressed support for Armenia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while also emphasising the importance of peaceful normalisation in the South Caucasus. Although these statements carried no legal force, their repeated endorsement in a multilateral setting remained politically significant. They reflected a gradual change in the international framing of Armenia's security environment by moving away from a predominantly Russia-centred perspective toward a broader European diplomatic approach.

Another major theme of the summit was regional connectivity. European leaders highlighted the importance of developing transport and energy corridors that could reduce dependence on Russia. While this agenda was not directed specifically at Armenia in legal or institutional terms, it indirectly increased the country's strategic importance as a geographic bridge between Europe and Asia.

At the same time, the EPC's limits were clear. No security guarantees were offered, and no defence commitments were discussed. This created a gap: Armenia gained visibility and political recognition, but not direct security protection. Nonetheless, the summit strengthened Armenia's diplomatic position.

Armenia's Diplomatic Repositioning and the Limits of Realignment

The EPC Summit suggests that Armenia's foreign policy is slowly changing, but not in a complete or dramatic way. Armenia used the summit to strengthen its contacts with European actors and to show itself as an open and cooperative partner in the region. This is particularly important since Armenian foreign policy has long been closely focused on Russia as its main security partner.

At the same time, this does not represent a break with Moscow. Armenia continues to be part of Russian-led structures such as the Eurasian Economic Union, also due to the strong economic ties between both countries.

Instead of choosing one side over the other, Armenia is adding new cooperation with the EU while keeping its existing relationships.

This creates an uneven situation as political and diplomatic changes are happening faster than changes in security policy. Armenia is becoming more involved in European discussions, but its security situation has not really changed. No other country or organization has replaced Russia's old security role, which leaves a gap between political engagement and actual protection.

The summit also showed that Armenia is more willing to take part in European political events, even if it increases tension with Russia. As a whole, this reflects a more flexible foreign policy shaped by the major changes in the region after 2020 and 2023.

EPC as a Bridge Toward Institutional Europeanisation

Even though the EPC Summit did not produce concrete policy instruments, it still played an important early or preparatory role. It helped make Armenia's presence in European multilateral meetings feel more normal and routine, and it also increased political openness toward deeper cooperation between the EU and Armenia in the region.

In practice, the EPC functions as a first layer of integration. It creates political visibility and diplomatic access without requiring formal commitments. Thus, it allows both Armenia and European partners to build cooperation step by step, without the pressure that comes with formal membership processes or security alliances.

The main importance of the summit is therefore not in specific outcomes, but in what it represents. It reflects a shift in how Armenia is seen – moving away from being viewed mainly through Russian-led frameworks and toward being part of broader European political discussions. At the same time, one key issue remains unchanged: Armenia's security dependence is still unresolved, and the EPC itself does not address it directly.

The EU-Armenia Summit: From Symbolism to Institutional Cooperation

Taking place right after the European Political Community Summit, the EU–Armenia Summit marked a shift from broad political signalling toward more structured cooperation between Armenia and the European Union. While the EPC summit mainly highlighted Armenia's growing visibility in European diplomacy, the EU–Armenia summit went further by setting out more concrete directions for cooperation in areas like security resilience, economic links, and governance reforms.

Security and Resilience Cooperation

In security and resilience, the EU repeated its support for Armenia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but it did not offer any security guarantees or alliance commitments. Cooperation stayed focused on civilian tools

such as protection against hybrid threats, cybersecurity, and countering disinformation.

The EU monitoring mission in Armenia, deployed in 2023 with over 200 civilian personnel, was also confirmed as part of continued engagement. Its role, however, is limited. It works mainly as an observation and stabilisation tool rather than a deterrence force. It can provide early warning and help reduce tensions, but it does not offer direct military protection.

This reflects a model often described as "resilience security," which focuses on building institutions and capacity instead of collective defence. This is very different from Armenia's earlier reliance on the CSTO, which failed to respond effectively during recent border escalations. That experience played an important role in Armenia's move toward more diversified security partnerships.

Economic Integration and Connectivity

The most important outcome of the summit was the EU–Armenia Connectivity Partnership. It focuses on three main areas: transport, energy, and digital infrastructure.

In transport, the aim is to better connect Armenia to regional and international routes linking Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia, which helps reduce isolation. In energy, cooperation focuses on diversifying supply routes and improving energy security. In the digital sector, the partnership supports infrastructure upgrades, regulatory alignment, and growth in Armenia's IT sector, which accounts for about 5–7% of GDP.

Together, these measures reduce Armenia's dependence on any single partner. This has clear geopolitical meaning, since it limits Russia's ability to use economic ties as leverage.

The Connectivity Partnership is also connected to the EU's Global Gateway, a large investment framework worth over €300 billion. In this setup, Armenia is seen less as an aid recipient and more as a potential transit and connectivity hub between regions. It also creates a more structured system for public and private investment.

In the long run, this expands Armenia's external options and slowly reduces its reliance on Russia, even without fully replacing it.

Democratic Reform and Governance Support

Alongside economic cooperation, the summit also strengthened EU–Armenia work on governance and reforms. The EU confirmed continued support for judicial independence, anti-corruption efforts, public administration reform, and the rule of law under the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

This support is increasingly conditional. Financial and technical assistance depends on progress in reforms and alignment with EU standards. The goal is to strengthen Armenia's institutions, which also has an indirect security value, since weaker governance can create vulnerabilities that outside actors might exploit.

Overall, the EU–Armenia Summit did not produce security guarantees or accession commitments, but it deepened structured cooperation in connectivity and resilience. This represents a shift toward institutionalised but non-military integration with the European Union: it reduces Armenia's reliance on Russia while reinforcing internal resilience.

International Reactions

Russia's Response

Russia reacted negatively to the Yerevan summits, seeing them as a sign that Armenia is slowly moving closer to the European Union. The Russian Foreign Ministry warned that deeper EU engagement could push Armenia into an "anti-Russian" political direction and weaken existing ties within the Eurasian Economic Union.

At the same time, Moscow stressed that Armenia is still formally part of Russian-led structures, which signals that Russia continues to see Armenia as part of its wider sphere of influence. Overall, this response reflects Russia's effort to maintain leverage through political pressure. In Armenia, however, it also strengthens the view that Russian security commitments are becoming less reliable.

Reactions from Azerbaijan and Turkey

Azerbaijan took a cautious approach, arguing that outside actors should not undermine bilateral negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Turkey expressed a similar view in indirect terms, supporting regional connectivity projects but insisting that they should be linked to progress on peace agreements and the opening of borders.

Both countries, therefore, treat EU engagement as politically relevant but not decisive in military terms. As a result, its short-term impact on regional security dynamics remains limited.

Strategic Reorientation, Hedging, or Multi-Vectorism?

Armenia's foreign policy after the summits cannot really be described as a full strategic shift, simple balancing, or classic multi-vector diplomacy. What we see instead is something more uneven and mixed. Armenia is clearly moving closer to the European Union through institutions and policy frameworks, but at the same time, it remains tied to Russian-led economic systems and still depends on outside actors for security. Because these trends do not move in the same direction or at the same speed, it becomes difficult to place Armenia neatly into any standard international relations category.

If we start with the idea of a "strategic reorientation," this would normally mean a clear and lasting change in alliances, usually including a new security provider. That is not the case here. No Western actor has replaced Russia's former security role, and there are no formal defence guarantees or accession paths in place. So the security foundation remains largely unchanged.

The idea of "balancing" also does not fully fit. Balancing assumes that a state can rely on two roughly equal external sides. But in Armenia's case, this symmetry is missing. Russia's credibility as a security partner has weakened after the 2020 war and especially after the 2023 developments in Nagorno-Karabakh, while the EU does not act as a military counterweight. So Armenia is not balancing between equals.

Even "multi-vector" foreign policy is only partially useful here. In theory, it suggests a state can freely shift between partners and manage relations independently. In practice, Armenia's room for manoeuvre is limited by geography, security exposure, and economic dependence. This makes its choices less flexible than the term usually implies.

A more accurate way to understand the situation is to see it as a constrained and uneven form of reorientation combined with hedging. In simple terms, Armenia is gradually moving closer to Europe in areas like governance, connectivity, and economic policy, while still keeping ties with Russia because it cannot fully replace its security function. This creates a dual structure. On one side, Armenia's political and economic alignment is slowly becoming more European. On the other side, its security situation remains unresolved and dependent on external actors that do not fully provide protection. The result is not a stable balance, but a mismatch: political and economic change is moving faster than security change, which leaves Armenia in a flexible but uncertain position.

Conclusion: A European Opening Under Constraints

The European Political Community Summit, together with later EU–Armenia deepening, shows that Armenia's external orientation is gradually changing. The main trend is a shift away from exclusive reliance on Russia toward closer engagement with Europe in politics, economics, and governance.

This process remains incomplete because security structures have not changed at the same pace. Russia's credibility as a security partner has weakened, while geography, regional tensions, and economic dependence continue to limit Armenia's strategic options.