



The Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Process and the Role of Turkey

Thomas de Waal

Summary

Normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan is within reach after more than 30 years of conflict. The so-called TRIPP agreement, approved by the two countries and the United States in a trilateral declaration signed in Washington, is a major step forward in furthering a new connectivity agenda that ties the two countries together, along with Turkey, and opens up Armenia's trade routes to the West. However, much can still go wrong before a full peace agreement is signed and borders reopen. Armenia faces two crucial votes next year, and Russia will use opportunities to destabilize Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The European Union is actively supporting the peace process. Turkey could be more proactive, but generally defers to Azerbaijan's timeline on normalizing relations.

The Issue

Armenia and Azerbaijan have agreed in principle on a historic agreement which would normalize relations between the two countries after more than three decades of conflict. In Washington on August 8, 2025, in a White House meeting with U.S. president Donald Trump, the two leaders, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev initialled [the text of a 17-point agreement](#) "to establish peace and inter-state relations" between them.

Signing and ratification of the agreement hinges on a demand made by Baku: that Armenia change its constitution or adopt a new one to remove an indirect reference to the union of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the disputed Armenian-populated region inside Azerbaijan, which was the main cause of conflict between the two nations until Azerbaijan took it over militarily in 2023. The fall of Karabakh to Azerbaijan, though a tragedy for the more than 100,000 Armenians who fled their homes, has made it easier for the two countries to recognize each other's territorial integrity.

In Washington, the three leaders also signed a [declaration](#) committing Armenia and Azerbaijan to "closing the chapter of enmity between our two nations" and agreed on a plan for the route that connects Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan across Armenian territory. The route, known by Azerbaijan as the "Zangezur Corridor" was renamed "The Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" or TRIPP. A joint U.S.-Armenia company is being formed to rebuild the disused 43-km railway line across southern Armenia, using digital technology and electricity cables. Modalities are still being negotiated [to ensure](#) "unimpeded connectivity" for Azerbaijani trains, while respecting Armenian sovereignty.

Turkey is not mentioned in these documents, nor was it represented in Washington, yet its role is key. Turkey, Azerbaijan's closest ally, has not had diplomatic relations with Armenia since it became independent in 1991 and has kept its land border with Armenia closed since 1993.

Nevertheless, Turkey's line on Armenia is much less aggressive than Azerbaijan's. Armenian citizens cross into Turkey on flights between Yerevan and

Turkish cities (with Turkish Airlines [projected to start flights](#) in 2026). There are reports that the border may open in the New Year of 2026 for third-party nationals, in what would be a trial for a full opening at a later date.

Prime minister Pashinyan says he is ready to normalize relations with Ankara without preconditions. Turkey has been stalling, evidently out of sensitivity to Azerbaijan, which is not just an ally, but has invested in Turkey's business, energy sector, and media. The South Caucasus is not a first-order priority for Ankara and does not figure high in day-to-day business between Turkey and the EU and the United States.

Analysis

If and when a peace accord is struck between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it will open up a region that has been semi-closed since the end of the Soviet Union.

The opening of the Armenia-Turkey land border will have special significance. Once the border fully opens, it will be a pivotal moment for Armenians, who will experience a highly symbolic official rapprochement with a country that they associate with the catastrophe commonly known as the Armenian Genocide of 1915-16. Armenia will gain new routes to the West, loosening its economic and security dependence on Russia.

However, the road ahead will not be smooth. The legacy of conflict between the two nations still weighs heavily. Prime minister Pashinyan has made the slogan "Real Armenia" the centerpiece of his political program. By this he means a functioning state within the Republic of Armenia with normalized relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, in contrast to what he calls "Historic Armenia," an Armenia that harbors territorial claims against its neighbours.

Pashinyan's government has made several steps to loosen Armenia's reliance on Russia's security umbrella and border guard force. Russia's response has been cautious thus far, but mainly because it is tied down in Ukraine.

Pashinyan's project faces two big tests in 2026. In June, his Civil Contract party will participate in parliamentary elections. An [opinion poll](#) published by the International Republican Institute in June shows that Pashinyan's popularity has fallen sharply. His party is currently the favourite in the elections only because other opposition parties are very weak.

As it has in elections in other post-Soviet republics like Moldova, Russia will use all available means to promote a pro-Russian candidate who would tilt the country back towards Moscow. One such figure may be Samvel Karapetyan, the Russian-Armenian oligarch, who was arrested in June for an alleged plot to overthrow the government and whose nephew now leads a party founded in his name.

The second test Pashinyan faces, if he wins the election, is the need to hold and win a national referendum on a new constitution that will remove the indirect reference to the union of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh enshrined in the current constitution.

All of this delays a full rapprochement and opening of borders.

There are also concerns about how quickly and effectively the TRIPP agreement can be implemented. The U.S. government has allocated a relatively small team to work on the project and many important details are still being worked out.

The structure of the [U.S.-Armenian company](#) that will manage the project is still being negotiated. [Financing](#) is being sought, and although the U.S. would prefer private funds, this will be difficult to secure in such a geopolitically volatile region. Security arrangements must be agreed. Modalities of entry and exit need to be arranged so that Azerbaijani trains entering and leaving Armenian territory do so smoothly and legally.

More broadly, TRIPP is being talked up as a new important segment in the so-called "Middle Corridor" transit route connecting Europe to Central Asia and China via the South Caucasus, championed by

Turkey since the start of the Ukraine war in 2022 as an alternative to the Northern Route across Russia and the Maritime Route via the Suez Canal.

Two considerations temper this ambition. One is that there are existing transit routes across Georgia, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, opened in 2017. Second, TRIPP constitutes only a local route to and from Nakhchivan. Other routes need to reopen from Nakhchivan into Turkey for it to become an international route and a viable alternative to the Georgian routes. The EU is being invited by both Armenia and Azerbaijan to fund some of these connectivity projects.

A dispute is looming, however, about which route will be taken between Nakhchivan and Kars. In August, President Erdoğan broke ground on a new projected 224-km railway line between Kars and Nakhchivan, which may cost more than \$3 billion. Armenians say that it would be far cheaper to rebuild or upgrade Soviet-era railways through Armenia proper and that using this existing route would make their country a full stakeholder in a new regional peace.

Implications

Much work needs to be done in 2026 to consolidate the progress made between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2025. Ankara and Brussels are two actors that can make a significant impact in making this happen.

Ankara, the actor with the most capacity and less burdened by conflict than either Armenia or Azerbaijan, can also play a pivotal role. Thus far, it seems prepared to consider intermediate confi-

dence-building measures but is unlikely to fully normalize relations with Armenia until a peace treaty with Azerbaijan is signed—something that could take place by the end of 2026, unless thwarted by events.

The United States has taken the lead on the TRIPP agreement. However, this is a rare instance in Trump era foreign policy in which Washington actively seeks cooperation with the EU and other partners. Proactive diplomacy and speedy dispersal of funds by the EU will assist the process greatly.

South Caucasus Transport Routes



Source: Used with permission of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Further Reading

Thomas de Waal, An Unlikely Road to Peace for Armenia and Azerbaijan, [Foreign Affairs](#), 22 September 22, 2025

Anna Ohanyan, Can Turkey Cut the Gordian Knot in the Caucasus, [Carnegie Europe](#), 10 November 2025

Thomas de Waal, Armenia's Election Is a Foreign Affair, [Carnegie Europe](#), 12 November 2025



Takeaways

- » It is a mistake to assume that the TRIPP agreement is a done deal. Full financing is not yet secure, and many of the details are still being negotiated.
- » Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan, a strong advocate of normalization with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, is still vulnerable to Russia and faces two difficult elections in 2026.
- » Turkey-Azerbaijan solidarity remains strong. It is unlikely that Turkey will proceed to full normalization of relations with Armenia without a clear green light from Baku. However, many intermediate steps are possible and Ankara is likely to be more proactive if the issue arises in its bilateral agenda with the EU and U.S.
- The EU has the political and financial capacity to make a positive impact in the South Caucasus in a critical year and fill gaps where Washington is unable to provide resources.

Rekommendationer - svenska

- » TRIPP-avtalet är inte ännu i hamn. Den fullständiga finansieringen är ännu inte säkrad och många detaljer är fortfarande föremål för förhandlingar.
- » Armeniens premiärminister Nikol Pasjinian, en stark förespråkare för normalisering med både Azerbajdzjan och Turkiet, förblir sårbar gentemot Ryssland och står inför två svåra val under 2026.
- » Solidariteten mellan Turkiet och Azerbajdzjan är fortsatt stark. Det är osannolikt att Turkiet går vidare med en full normalisering av relationerna med Armenien utan ett tydligt godkännande från Baku. Däremot finns flera möjliga mellanliggande steg, och Ankara kan förväntas agera mer proaktivt om frågan aktualiseras i dess bilaterala agendor med EU och USA.
- » EU har både den politiska och finansiella kapaciteten att spela en konstruktiv roll i Sydkaukasien under ett kritiskt år och fylla tomrum där Washington saknar möjlighet att tillföra resurser.

About the SUITS policy brief

This policy brief aims contribute to a broad and well-researched understanding of Turkey and Turkish affairs through presenting a variety of voices on current issues and the foundational moments that impact today. The aim is to provide policy makers and others the tools to make informed decisions.

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