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Input paper: Adapting EU Policy – Enlargement and the Future of EU Neighborhood Policy

View from Armenia, by Anna Gevorgyan (Center for Culture and Civilization Studies).

How are the current geopolitical changes and enlargement process influencing the future of the EU's Eastern neighborhood policy?

The security landscape in the South Caucasus is undergoing significant transformations that can be described not so much as the making of a new security architecture as the disappearance of any security architecture. There is intentional destruction of the old security and political frameworks, meaning weakened old security and political ties and a significant lack of new configurations. This leads to the emergence of spontaneous and fragmented constructs without cohesive strategic security and foreign policy planning and implementation.

In this reality, the current geopolitical changes and the enlargement process of the EU create opportunities as well as significant risks for Armenia's security. Russia's weakening influence in the region and anti-Armenian actions in coordination with Azerbaijan have led to growing tensions in the South Caucasus and disappointment with the presence of [Russian peacekeepers and with Russia overall](#). As a result, there is a growing tendency of [mutual accusations](#) and significant tension between Armenia and Russia, as well as doubts about [Armenia's participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization](#).

All this creates a big risk of "punishment" by Moscow, which can have economic and political features considering Armenia's huge [economic dependence on Russia](#) and the [Russian propaganda](#) against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Armenia does not have a proper strategy to deter this, and it still lacks sufficient alternative routes and markets for its goods even though Moscow's first economic steps ([increasing customs control](#) or [blocking Armenian products](#) at the Lars checkpoint) are already in place. These developments have led to the necessity for Armenia to internationalize not only the conflict resolution for Nagorno-Karabakh but also the overall normalization process of relations with Azerbaijan, whereas Azerbaijan tries to "solve" the problems via threatening by military means. In this framework, the mediation attempts by the EU and the United States have been perceived in Armenia as an opportunity to escape the regional security trap, which is compounded by the absence of alternative strong security guarantees from elsewhere, leaving the country in a precarious position.

The deployment of the EU civilian mission at the borders of Armenia as well as the [decision to enlarge its resources](#) and the [inclusion of Canada](#) in it, coupled with France's decision [to open a consulate](#) in Kapan, in the center of the Syunik region of Armenia, are very important steps taken by the EU. They are not sufficient, however. They were factors restraining military escalation on the Armenian border, but they were insufficient to prevent the [ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh](#). Considering that all of Azerbaijan's [brutal actions were predictable](#), there is a need for more preventive measures in the EU's toolkit. Furthermore, the fact that there has been almost no consequences for Azerbaijan after its military attack and ethnic cleansing has shattered the credibility of the EU and its measures.

Stronger prevention measures must be taken by the EU, starting with individual sanctions on members of Azerbaijan's authorities and conditionality on economic cooperation with it. The lack of the EU's

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leverage as well as the shattered global security system and the developments in Ukraine and in the Gaza Strip and Israel can empower Azerbaijan to implement its further military plans in the region. The consequences of this scenario for the EU would be public disappointment in Armenia in the EU's capabilities and the leverage it has on the countries of the region, stronger pro-Russia political discourse in Armenia, and less influence for the EU, which would be kept out of the region by Iran and Russia with the support of Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Where do you see the EU's role in future relations with your country beyond the current policy? What should be the key priorities for the EU?

Beyond the security field, the EU has a significant role to play in the connectivity and economic cooperation of the region. In this regard, current negotiations and tensions on the "corridor" issue must urgently be included in the discussions on Armenia-EU relations. There are different interpretations of that issue, and that of the EU aligns with Armenian aspirations, emphasizing the [protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity](#). Furthermore, only through this kind of implementation of the project of the unblocking of all transit routes can the regional integration of Armenia be possible, whereas an extraterritorial corridor will once again exclude it from regional economic connection. Continuing demands of the "corridor" from Azerbaijan will create a new risk of military escalation, this time with the involvement of Iran and Turkey, considering Iran's [harsh opposition](#) to the cutting of the Armenia-Iran border as a result of the implementation of extraterritorial corridor through the Southern region of Armenia. The transit route via Armenia can be a crucial part of the middle corridor and provide EU countries one more option for reaching Asian markets while bypassing Russia. Azerbaijan uses this advantage of the road connecting Azerbaijan with Nakhijevan and passing through Armenia for another manipulation: it declares that if Armenia "will not give the corridor," it will create one [via Iran](#). The fact is that Azerbaijan always had a transit route to Nakhijevan via Iran and, though it constructs a new and shorter one, this still is just a transit route in the framework of Iran's sovereignty and not an extraterritorial corridor. Azerbaijan manipulates the narrative to mislead the West concerning this issue, creating an illusion of alternative of routes passing through Azerbaijan or Iran, thus expecting support for Azerbaijan considering the relations between Western countries and Iran. The reality is that the alternatives are a transit route under the sovereignty of Armenia and [opening or reopening all regional communications](#) through negotiation between Armenia and Azerbaijan, or else Azerbaijan gaining an extraterritorial corridor by military means, which would create a new risk of a regional war, with Russia gaining a new opportunity to intervene and to relocate some of its "peacekeepers" who are still in Nagorno-Karabakh to the Syunik region of Armenia. Strengthening the EU's position in this regard through investment in the transport field and railway construction, and helping Armenia to regain sovereignty over its Russian-owned railways system, would be an important milestone in widening Armenia-EU relations.

Extraordinary times need exceptional decisions and speed. Armenia is interested in deepening its relations with the EU. Both, though, have an unrealized potential to deal with in their Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement. In this regard, several steps can be implemented to open a wider window of opportunity for the diversification of Armenia's political, security, and economic ties with the EU, such as visa liberalization, economic integration, security cooperation, and domestic reform in Armenia. The country's economy can be freed from Russia's growing influence by supporting the diversification of the energy sector, by the inclusion of Armenia in the Black Sea Underwater Electricity Cable and the EU's Global gateway, and by reducing customs tariffs for Armenian products. In the legal field, assistance to Armenia for the submission of cases to the International Criminal Court and earmarked funding to the court for the investigation of these cases would be a major step. Starting the

negotiations on visa liberalization would send a message to Armenian society about the changing attitudes of the EU toward a state that has a fragile democracy and a society where [anti-Russia sentiments](#) are at an all-time high.