

TRIPP Reorienting Armenia and Azerbaijan Toward the West

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Executive Summary: Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan indicated on August 28 that Moscow is no longer Yerevan's strategic partner, as Russia's relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan deteriorate and both countries deepen engagement with the West. Armenia's railways slows Yerevan's part of the route. Armenia is using Moscow's reluctance to rebuild the lines to justify ending the concession and seeking Western funding.

- Azerbaijan is pushing for the swift implementation of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP). Since a Russian missile struck an Azerbaijani passenger aircraft in 2024, Baku has strained its partnership with Moscow, backed Ukraine, and offered to supply Armenia with electricity.
- Russian ownership of Armenia's railways slows Yerevan's part of the route. Armenia is using Moscow's reluctance to rebuild the lines to justify ending the concession and seeking Western funding.

On August 28, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated at a press conference that Moscow can no longer be regarded as Yerevan's strategic partner (Armenpress, August 27). His sharp rhetoric toward Russia is hardly unexpected, given that relations between Moscow and both Yerevan and Baku have recently deteriorated again. Yerevan attributes its stance to Moscow's failure to fulfill its treaty obligations during the Second Karabakh War with Azerbaijan in 2020 (Armenpress, August 27). While Pashinyan's remarks underscored Yerevan's intention to strengthen its engagement with Western partners, they also triggered renewed controversy within Armenia's political establishment. The debate now centers on whether the long-standing Moscow-Yerevan strategic partnership remains relevant in the country's recalibrated foreign policy and regional security strategy (The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, August 27).

Moscow's growing discontent with Yerevan also stems from Armenia's vigorous embrace of the U.S.-backed Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) transit corridor agreement with Azerbaijan, signed in Washington in August 2025 (Caucasus Watch, August 6). The project envisions linking Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan exclave through Armenia's Syunik province, while granting Armenia access to the broader east-west trade network. In January, Armenia confirmed the establishment of the TRIPP+ Enterprise Fund, aimed at investing \$201 million in the South Caucasus and Central Asia (Hetq, August 5). This development is poised to erode Russia's long-term leverage over Armenia while fostering stronger intraregional connectivity across the South Caucasus that circumvents Russian territory (Interfax, August 24). By opening new trade and transit pathways, it also creates opportunities for external actors to establish a more tangible presence in Moscow's immediate neighborhood.

Armenia's firm stance on remaining in the European Union's close orbit since Pashinyan's re-election in June has further contributed to tensions with Russia. Economically, a fully functioning

TRIPP route, which will form the southern part of the Middle Corridor, would compete with the Russian-Iranian-backed North-South Corridor, undermining Moscow's long-term geoeconomic strategy (SpecialEurasia, January 28). Armenia's coordination with Azerbaijan on constructing TRIPP-related railway and highway infrastructure also complicates Moscow's relations with Baku.

Over the past three years, Russia-Azerbaijan relations have deteriorated following the incident in which a Russian missile struck an Azerbaijani passenger aircraft over the North Caucasus (see EDM, January 15, 2025). Moscow's initial restricted apology, coupled with its orchestrated anti-Azerbaijani campaign in domestic media, further strained bilateral ties (AzerNews, September 11). Baku suspended its partnership with Russia and moved away from its neutrality on Russia's war against Ukraine, voicing support for Kyiv and hosting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Gabala in April (President of Ukraine, April 25; see EDM, May 4).

Baku perceived the systematic anti-Azerbaijani campaign as part of Russia's hybrid operations and pushed for the swift implementation of the TRIPP. Against the backdrop of Moscow's strained ties with both Yerevan and Baku, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev proposed that Azerbaijan could supply Armenia with electricity, effectively positioning itself as a substitute for Russia in regional energy connectivity (Arab News, August 12). The envisioned linkage of Azerbaijan's power grid with Nakhchivan via Armenia underscores this ambition. Baku interprets Russia's assertive rhetoric and its reliance on information campaigns, diaspora mobilization, and economic pressure as evidence that Moscow's traditional political instruments in the South Caucasus are eroding (European Pravda, September 14).

Armenia has moved closer to Azerbaijan's more distant stance toward Russia. Pashinyan publicly acknowledged for the first time that Azerbaijani specialists visited Armenia in 2025 and 2026 to discuss the development of power transmission lines, railway construction, and energy pipelines, while Moscow remained a passive bystander (Report, August 13). As tensions with Russia persist, Azerbaijan has set its sights on starting construction of the Armenian segment of the TRIPP corridor. The process appears more complicated on Yerevan's side due to persistent issues with Armenia's railway company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Russian Railways (RZhD) (SpecialEurasia, January 28).

Armenia's only viable course is to show that Russia is unwilling or unable to run the country's railways. In early 2026, Yerevan formally asked Moscow to speed up the reconstruction of Soviet-era lines along Armenia's segment of TRIPP, expecting Moscow to refuse (CivilNet, January 15; see EDM, March 31). These include the stretch in the Akhurik area from the Armenia-Türkiye border to the existing operational network, the line from the Armenia-Nakhchivan border to Yeraskh, and the Tavush section up to and including the Ijevan railway station (CivilNet, January 15). Such reluctance gives the Armenian government greater latitude to criticize Moscow, highlight the urgency of revoking the concession awarded to RZhD, and actively pursue financial backing from external partners, particularly in the West (CivilNet, January 15). External funding would effectively internationalize the TRIPP project, an outcome that has already unsettled both Russia and Iran, given its potential to recalibrate regional connectivity.

Challenges within the regional security architecture, such as resistance from the Moscow-Tehran axis and the U.S.-Iran war, are causing some delays. On September 8, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov, during a meeting with U.S. diplomats, put a positive spin on the delay, saying that "according to the information we have received, the process is proceeding successfully" (Eurasianet, September 10).

Baku seeks to establish durable commercial ties with both Armenia and Europe at a time when Russia is distracted by Ukraine's recent drone strikes and is losing leverage in the South Caucasus.

For Armenia, the drive behind the rapid development of this new route stems from its determination to diversify the economy, reduce dependence on Russia, and expand exports to Europe. In the first half of this year, Armenia's exports to the European Union surpassed \$516 million, an increase of more than 80 percent year-on-year, while trade turnover with Russia fell by 20.5 percent over the same period (OC Media, July 13; Public Radio of Armenia, August 20).

A fully operational TRIPP would deepen U.S. and EU influence in the South Caucasus. The route would also limit Russia's leverage over market access and expand Armenia's economic autonomy and Azerbaijan's room for political and security partnerships beyond the region (Eurasianet, August 28). Despite Russia's pressure on Armenia to choose between the European Union and the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Yerevan is buying time, arguing that it has not reached the critical moment when it must make a definitive choice.

From Russia's perspective, Armenia's pro-Western orientation and growing estrangement should hardly surprise it (Eurasianet, August 28). Beyond its political symbolism, Armenia has tangible economic and sanctions-evasion value for Russia as the only viable land corridor to Iran outside Azerbaijan's and Türkiye's control. This geographic leverage explains why Moscow views Yerevan's pivot with unease. Russia's relations with Azerbaijan are even more turbulent. On August 27, posters with anti-Azerbaijani slogans were placed outside the guest house of Azerbaijan's embassy in Moscow. Baku condemned the act as a provocation, linked it to a biased campaign in Russian media, and demanded that Moscow investigate (Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 27).

Azerbaijan signals with such uncompromising statements that it is prepared for diplomatic escalation with Russia and willing to confront actions that challenge Baku's self-perception as a "middle power." Baku interprets Moscow's attempts to undermine strategically significant interregional projects, many of which Azerbaijan pursues with Armenia, as little more than efforts to preserve residual leverage in the South Caucasus.

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