

EU-ARMENIA COOPERATION AND CHANGING REGIONAL BALANCES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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The European Union Partnership Mission in Armenia (EUPM Armenia) officially began operations on 13 July 2026. Aimed at strengthening Armenias resilience, this initiative marks the EUs second mission in the country. The first mission, the European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA), was established in 2023 to monitor the security situation on the Armenian side of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, contribute to human security, and support confidence-building measures between the two countries.[1] In contrast, the Partnership Mission in Armenia is designed as a more comprehensive cooperation mechanism aimed at enhancing the Armenian authorities resilience to hybrid threats and strengthening their ability to address emerging security challenges. Within this framework, the mission is envisaged to work in close cooperation with Armenian institutions through strategic advisory services, technical expertise, and institutional capacity-building activities; thereby contributing to the strengthening of the relevant policy framework, the enhancement of the governments capacity in related areas, and the improvement of inter-agency coordination.[2]

Established at the request of the Government of Armenia on 21 April 2026, the priorities of this Partnership Mission include combating cyber threats, enhancing resilience against foreign information manipulation and interference, and providing support to Armenian institutions in the fight against illicit financial flows. One notable aspect of the mission is that Kaja Kallas, the EUs High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, views this initiative as part of a broader process of economic and political support aimed at strengthening Armenias resilience against pressure from Russia.[3]

Considering these statements and the political, economic, and institutional support the EU has provided to Armenia in recent times, it can be concluded that the EU is not only conducting technical cooperation with Armenia, but is also adopting an approach that aligns with the political orientation of with the countrys current administration. Armenias gradual distancing from Russia and the deepening of its relations with the EU signal a transformation in the countrys foreign policy axis, while the potential effects of this process on regional geopolitical balances are also bringing new debates to the fore.

In this context, the fact that Georgias relations with the EU have followed a more limited course compared to previous years, in line with the foreign policy pursued by Georgias current administration, reinforces the assessments that the EU is concentrating its political and institutional influence in the region on Armenia. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, while continuing to pursue a multifaceted and balanced foreign policy approach, retains its importance for the EU, particularly in terms of energy security and the Middle Corridor. For this reason, the EUs deepening of its relations with Armenia does not eliminate the need for cooperation with other partners in the region, foremost among them Azerbaijan.

The EUs recent comprehensive cooperation with Armenia and its placement of increasing emphasis on Armenia in its South Caucasus policy also raise certain questions. Although the EU emphasizes that it aims to develop balanced relations with the countries in the region, how this approach will be perceived by various actors in the South Caucasus and how it will affect regional security and the peace process in the long term are among the issues that must be closely monitored in the coming period.

Furthermore, the diaspora factor has also drawn attention within the framework of the cooperation developed between the EU and Armenia in recent times. During the EU-Armenia Summit held in Yerevan on 5 May 2026, the parties signed a Connectivity Partnership Declaration and announced letters of intent to develop cooperation with various Armenian companies and organizations to support this partnership with concrete projects. The inclusion of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) among these organizations stands out as a notable development.[4]

To better assess the significance of this cooperation, it would be helpful to briefly touch upon the history of AGBU. Controversial for its activities supporting the Armenian genocide claims and its rhetoric directed at neighboring countries, the Union traces its founding to 1906. It is known that AGBU, which began operations in Egypt, later moved its headquarters to Paris and New York and maintains a broad network of branches operating in Europe, the Americas, and the Caucasus.[5] Although its founding charter states that it would refrain from political activities and that its primary purpose is to provide material and moral support to Armenians in need, its activities throughout history have gone beyond this framework. Indeed, various studies have revealed that AGBU maintained close ties with Armenian revolutionary committees and was linked to anti-Turkish activities in Anatolia during the final period of the Ottoman State.

In this regard, the EUs decision to develop cooperation with AGBU raises various concerns. At a time when the normalization process between Armenia and Türkiye is ongoing and

diplomatic efforts to establish lasting peace in the South Caucasus are continuing, cooperation with an organization that is the subject of historical and political debate raises some questions regarding what role the EU is seeking to play in the region. This situation also sparks debate regarding the extent to which the EUs rhetoric on peace and reconciliation aligns with the policies it actually implements.

On the other hand, considering the sometimes tense relations between the Armenian administration and the Diaspora in the South Caucasus, the EUs decision to develop cooperation with AGBU can be evaluated from various perspectives. This initiative lays the groundwork for interpretations suggesting that the EU aims not only to strengthen Armenias resilience against Russia or contribute to the countrys political and economic development, but also to indirectly contribute to the reshaping of relations between the Armenian administration and the Diaspora. Thus, EU-Armenia relations possess a multidimensional character that simultaneously influences security, the economy, and internal political dynamics.

In conclusion, it can be said that the cooperation that has taken shape between the EU and Armenia in recent times has a multifaceted nature, encompassing various areas such as security, the economy, institutional capacity, and diaspora relations. However, the fact that certain choices and policies are open to different interpretations also raises various questions. The developments in the coming period will allow for a better assessment of the effects of both the cooperation developed with diaspora organizations and the selective approach pursued in the South Caucasus on regional security and lasting peace.

[1] About European Union Mission in Armenia, July 17, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/european-union-mission-armenia/about-european-union-mission-armenia_en?s=410283

[2] Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia and Civilian Operations Commander and Managing Director of the EEAS hosted expert roundtable dedicated to the launch of EUPM Armenia, July 14, 2026, https://armenpress.am/tr/article/1255464

[3] EU Launches New Mission in Armenia to Fight Against Hybrid Threats, July 17, 2026, https://asbarez.com/eu-launches-new-mission-in-armenia-to-against-hybrid-threats/

[4] First Armenia □□□ summit in Yerevan adopts 44-point joint declaration, July 17, 2026, https://jam-news.net/first-armenia-eu-summit-in-yerevan/

[5] Aslan, Taner. 2016. ERMENİ YARDIMSEVER HAYIR CEMİYETİ (ERMENİ CEMİYYET-İ HÂYRİYE-İ UMÛMİYESİ) VE NİZAMNAMESİ. Ermeni Araştırmaları, sy 53: 141-74. https://izlik.org/JA56GS54WU.

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