Policy Brief # 3

Teimuraz Janjalia

The European Political Community Summit in Yerevan: Continuation of Symbolism, or Practical Interaction?

The opinions and conclusions expressed are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU Awareness Centre

May 2026

© [2026] EU Awareness Centre. All rights reserved.

The European Political Community Summit in Yerevan: Continuation of Symbolism, or Practical Interaction?

Preamble

The eighth European Political Community summit, convened in Yerevan on 4 May 2026 under the motto "Building the Future: Unity and Stability in Europe," created a moment of strategic recalibration of EU interests to the East of the European continent. Against a backdrop of regional instability and intensified great-power competition, European capitals used the EPC's flexible diplomatic format to couple political signalling with preparatory operational measures aimed at bringing Armenia into European connectivity, security and economic architectures. This is an important milestone for the EU's involvement in the South Caucasus Region, with a concrete vision and action. Convened the day before the inaugural EU-Armenia Summit, the meeting assembled forty-eight leaders from across the continent and beyond, including, for the first time, a non-European participant, Canada's prime minister, and the highest-level Turkish representation in Armenia since 2013.

The Summit

The EPC meeting was an explicit act of geopolitical framing: holding the forum in the South Caucasus repositioned Armenia at the centre of a European conversation about resilience, connectivity and security. European Council President António Costa described the gathering as "historic," saying it placed Armenia "in the heart of Europe," while Commission President Ursula von der Leyen framed the engagement as elevating the partnership "to a new level," citing progress on visa liberalization and substantial Global Gateway investment potential. Those rhetorical acts conveyed collective recognition of Armenia's sovereign choice to deepen ties with Europe and signalled to external actors that many European capitals now share a stake in South Caucasus stability. The summit's "360°" approach linked democratic resilience, counter-disinformation measures and energy and economic security into a single policy frame intended to make coercive external interference costlier and less effective.

EU-Armenia cooperation

Although the EPC produces no binding outcomes and operates primarily as a platform for candid multilateral and bilateral exchanges, Yerevan combined that flexible format with substantive debate about the profound geopolitical anxieties now shaping Europe and with preparatory operational measures presented at the subsequent EU-Armenia Summit. The EPC welded political will across capitals to the already prepared EU technical and financial offers. That political convening enabled a package of operational measures: a signed EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership focused on transport, energy, digital links and people-to-people connectivity, framed alongside Armenia's "Crossroad of Peace" initiative; a Commission and EU institutions Call for Expressions of Interest to identify investible transport, energy and digital projects; and a clear signalling of Global Gateway backing, Commission estimates referenced around €2.5 billion in potential investment for Armenia, alongside the active Resilience & Growth Plan of roughly €270 million. Operational cooperation on border management advanced with an initialled working arrangement between Armenia's Ministry of Internal Affairs and the EU Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), the EU Partnership Mission (established in April) was emphasized as a resilience tool, and the Commission formally handed over a progress report on Armenia's Visa Liberalization Action Plan with recommendations and reminders that visa-free travel remains conditional on fully met benchmarks.

Firsts and Openings

The summit also produced notable diplomatic firsts and openings. Turkey's high-level participation, marked by Vice President Cevdet Yilmaz's visit, represented the highest-ranking Turkish presence in Armenia since 2013 and underscored a tentative thaw in bilateral relations, even as deep historical grievances and unresolved bilateral issues remain. Canada's inclusion as the first non-European participant signalled a willingness among partners beyond Europe to diversify diplomatic and trade ties in response to broader strategic uncertainties. These

gestures broaden the constituency prepared to underwrite Armenia's reform trajectory and to share the political cost of supporting its sovereignty and connectivity.

Political Incentive

Political messages reinforced that practical thrust: leaders emphasized defence of a rules-based international order and a 360° security vision, von der Leyen highlighted Europe's readiness to help open routes to Central Asia and Caspian markets, and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan welcomed EU support for democratic reform, resilience and measures to tackle hybrid threats.

Yet the summit's political achievements coexist with material implementation and geopolitical constraints that will determine whether the EPC moment yields durable change. The principal operational constraint is the announcement-to-delivery gap. Converting Global Gateway headline figures and connectivity ambitions into bankable projects requires credible project preparation, transparent procurement, strengthened public financial management and anti-corruption safeguards. Armenia's institutional capacity to absorb large infrastructure and reform packages is limited, absent a dedicated project preparation facility and an urgent focus on converting concepts into shovel-ready projects, much of the announced support risks stalling at the planning stage. Visa liberalization and other incentives are explicitly conditional on progress in rule of law benchmarks, judicial independence, and procurement reform. Without accelerated, verifiable reforms, political momentum may lose its material counterpart, and assistance risks becoming politicized.

Risks

Geopolitical risk compounds these operational issues. The collective European embrace of Armenia inevitably intensifies strategic competition with Russia, which has publicly signalled unease about Armenia's rapid Western orientation and cautioned that deeper EU ties can be incompatible with Russia-led institutions. While the EU framed its approach as non-zero sum, the accumulation of economic and institutional linkages with Europe will alter Moscow's leverage and may provoke diplomatic/economic reactions or even military reactions (Russian Military base is still located in Armenia). Managing this friction requires careful diplomatic choreography: transparent project selection, visible regional benefits to reduce zero-sum perceptions, and flexible channels of communication with Moscow to limit unintended escalation. The summit debate also reflected wider security anxieties afflicting Europe. Senior contributions reiterated calls for a stronger, more autonomous European role in defence and crisis response, and tense exchanges, including a robust virtual intervention by Azerbaijan's president and assertive defence of parliamentary resolutions by the European Parliament president, illustrated that the EPC can host discordant positions without collapsing into paralysis, enabling candid diplomacy while complicating consensus on contentious regional questions. The broader security environment, unresolved elements of the Nagorno-Karabakh situation, spillovers from other conflicts and tensions linked to the Middle East war cited during the EPC, adds further operational uncertainty and may necessitate sustained security guarantees and risk mitigation.

Benefits

Strategically, the EPC delivered a practicable window of opportunity and widened Armenia's diplomatic and financial options. Armenia is becoming increasingly important to the West as a window onto the region and its broader dynamics. This is an important responsibility and a role previously held by Georgia, once a leading example of democratic transformation and EU-oriented development. Realizing that opportunity requires pragmatic sequencing: prioritize quick-win, high-visibility projects deliverable within twelve months to build public confidence and attract private co-finance; establish a project preparation facility backed by EU financial institutions and partner multilaterals to convert conceptual corridors into bankable investments; pair investments with technical assistance to bolster procurement integrity and governance; and link visa liberalization milestones to transparent, time bound reforms so conditionality remains credible and enforceable. If implemented successfully, these measures could accelerate economic reintegration and produce regional spillovers that strengthen the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization process by creating shared economic

incentives. Conversely, failure to deliver or to progress on rule of law would risk politicizing assistance and eroding domestic and international confidence.

What next

What to watch next are concrete indicators of follow-through: the publication of the full EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership text and project pipeline; responses and funding commitments from EU financial institutions and private investors following the Call for Expressions of Interest; the Commission's timeline and monitoring reports on visa liberalization benchmarks and Armenia's responses; and Moscow's diplomatic and economic reactions and any shifts in Armenia's engagements with EAEU/CSTO structures. These signals will reveal whether the political momentum forged in Yerevan translates into practical, bankable outcomes or remains primarily symbolic.

Conclusion

The Yerevan EPC proved strategically effective as a political instrument by combining symbolic inclusion, diplomatic breadth and preparatory operational steps to reframe Armenia's European trajectory. Its long-term value depends on three linked outcomes: the EU's ability to mobilize technical capacity and finance rapidly to produce bankable projects; Armenia's capacity and political will to implement verifiable governance and procurement reforms; and the skill of diplomatic actors in managing the geopolitical friction deeper European engagement invites. If those conditions are met, Yerevan can become the foundation for durable economic reintegration and resilience in the South Caucasus. If not, the summit risks remaining a powerful symbol with limited practical impact.

May 2026

Teimuraz Janjalia
Ambassador Janjalia is a career diplomat and expert in international affairs, economic strategy, and European integration. Over more than 26 years in the Georgian public service, he rose from intern to Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, leading diplomacy, EU integration processes, and strategic negotiations. He has represented Georgia in key international organisations, including the EU, UN, OSCE, GUAM, TRACECA and BSEC, and served as Ambassador to Latvia. His leadership helped shape major regional infrastructure and trade projects such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline and the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway. He has also designed institutional capacity-building programmes for public authorities and civil society.