Policy Brief

Armenia's EU Integration and EU Accession: Reflections on the Georgian Experience

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The brief is a joint effort by the EU Awareness Centre and the Yerevan Center of Foreign and Security Policy drawing on Georgia's experience of EU integration and accession to assess the opportunities and risks that Armenia may face pursuing a similar path.

Table of Contents:

- Executive Summary 2.
  - Key recommendations 2.
- Introduction 3.
- The Debate on EU Membership in Armenia 4.
- Recent Developments in EU-Armenia Integration 4.
  - Security Cooperation 4.
  - A Changing Security Environment 5.
  - Institutional and Economic Cooperation 5.
  - The Eurasian Economic Union Question 6.
  - Visa Liberalisation Dialogue 7.
  - High-Level Political Dialogue 7.
- Challenges For Armenia's EU Integration Aspirations 8.
- Lessons from the Georgian Experience 9.
- Conclusions and Recommendations 12.

Executive Summary

Armenia's European course has moved from aspiration to stated policy. The 2025 accession law, the Prime Minister's August 2026 announcement that Armenia will prepare an application, and an unprecedented density of cooperation with the European Union all point in one direction. Legally, however, the process has not yet begun: Armenia has not lodged an application under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, and it remains a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, whose common external tariff is incompatible with EU membership.

Georgia's experience offers Armenia both a model and a warning. Georgia moved from an Association Agreement to candidate status in under a decade, and then saw that progress stall within a year, despite public support for EU membership consistently around 80%. The central lesson of this brief is that high approval figures are no safeguard. Sustained cognitive operations can turn emotional, rather than informed, support against the European choice by exploiting fear of war, cultural anxieties, and the everyday costs of reform.

Key recommendations:

- Begin the national conversation now: tell citizens clearly that Armenia's future lies in the EU, without waiting for a formal application and without promising dates.
- Build informed rather than symbolic support, through open debate of the trade-offs and nationwide education on what integration means in practice.
- Build the administrative and technical capacity that integration requires: a central coordinating body with real authority, and the standards, certification and laboratory infrastructure without which market access remains theoretical.
- Prepare the Eurasian Economic Union question deliberately, including bilateral trade arrangements with current EAEU partners.
- Deliver tangible benefits short of membership — visa-free travel, sectoral access to the Single Market, roaming, education — and make their European origin visible.
- Treat resilience against Russian cognitive and hybrid operations as a core accession task, including in preparation for the planned referendum.
- For the EU: apply conditionality early and consistently, calibrate communication to Armenian society, and contest the information space rather than leaving it open.

Introduction

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, the Jermuk incident in 2022, and the forced displacement of Karabakh Armenians in 2023 demonstrated to Armenia that Russian-led organisations and security mechanisms were no longer functioning as expected. The declining effectiveness of Russian security mechanisms had a broader impact on Armenia's foreign policy from 2023 onwards, leading the country to gradually deepen its relations with the European Union and the United States. Armenia's European course is best understood in this light: as part of a broader diversification of its security, economic and political relations and as a sovereign choice, rather than as a balancing act directed against any other partner.

The deepening of relations between Armenia and the European Union should be seen as a step-by-step process accompanied by high-level visits, conferences, agreements, and various integration initiatives. However, it was only in 2024 that, for the first time, Armenian high-level officials, including the Prime Minister, publicly spoke about Armenia's possible EU membership. The Prime Minister, in particular, stated during an interview that "Armenia is ready to be closer to the European Union, as much as the European Union considers it possible." In September of the same year, a group of political activists and a coalition of pro-European political parties launched a petition calling for Armenia's EU accession process. The resulting law "On the Launch of the Process of Accession of the Republic of Armenia to the European Union" was approved by the government and adopted by the National Assembly on 26 March 2025, entering into force the following month. Although the law is declaratory in nature and has no binding legal force, the petition and the law can nevertheless be regarded as the first clear political steps that opened the debate on Armenia's possible EU membership.

The debate gained further momentum in August 2026, when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told parliament, presenting the government's 2026–2031 programme, that Armenia would begin preparing an official application for EU membership "in the near future", and that a national referendum would follow only once an application had been lodged and a roadmap agreed with Brussels. This is the strongest political commitment by an Armenian government to the country's European path to date. Its legal status should nevertheless be stated precisely: Armenia has not yet submitted an application under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and does not hold candidate status, so the announcement opens a preparatory phase rather than the accession process itself. Following the parliamentary elections of 7 June 2026, in which the governing Civil Contract party retained its majority, the European course is also formally part of the government's programme for 2026–2031.

The Debate on EU Membership in Armenia

The debate over possible EU membership in Armenia includes different positions, ranging from political groups that completely oppose Armenia's EU accession plans to groups and experts that support the accession process. However, even within these opposing positions, there are different lines of argument. Some proponents of Armenia's EU membership plans are more optimistic, arguing that Armenia should accelerate the application process and make use of the window of opportunity created by the Russian-Ukrainian war. On the other hand, more sceptical supporters of Armenia's European path argue that, based on the experience of Montenegro, Albania, Serbia and other candidate countries, the accession process itself may last decades. Therefore, they argue that Armenia should first reduce its vulnerabilities and strengthen its capabilities before moving further on the European path.

Opponents of a possible EU membership argue either that Armenia's accession is unrealistic or that it could create additional tensions with Russia. Other arguments are based on concerns about European values and a broader distrust of the European Union.

Besides the positions of political actors and experts, public opinion surveys by the International Republican Institute (IRI) show broad support for membership in principle: 72% of respondents supported Armenia's possible EU membership in February 2026. Asked how they would vote in a referendum, however, fewer committed themselves — 49% in June 2025 and 51% in February 2026 — with around a third saying they would not vote at all. The two figures measure different things and should not be read as a single trend. The gap between approval in principle and commitment at the ballot box is itself a finding, and the Georgian experience discussed below explains why it matters.

Recent Developments in EU–Armenia Integration

Although Armenia has not yet officially initiated the EU accession process, it has simultaneously deepened its integration with the European Union across a broad range of policy areas. This process covers political dialogue, security cooperation, economic integration, as well as people-to-people contacts.

Security Cooperation

One of the major areas of EU–Armenia cooperation concerns the security sector, including both EU missions and security-related programmes. A major step was the establishment of the European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA) in 2023 under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The mission contributes to stability along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border through civilian monitoring and confidence-building measures. Security cooperation was further deepened in 2026 through the establishment of the European Union Partnership

Mission (EUPM), launched in July 2026, which supports Armenia in strengthening its institutional capacities, particularly in the field of hybrid threats and resilience.

Besides the two CSDP missions, Armenia also received support through the European Peace Facility (EPF). Since 2024, the European Union has allocated a total of €30 million in two tranches for non-lethal assistance. Although this amount is relatively limited compared to Armenia's overall defence expenditures, it represents an important political and symbolic step in deepening security cooperation between Armenia and the European Union.

Another important step worth mentioning is Armenia's participation in CSDP missions, agreed in 2025. This transforms Armenia from being solely a recipient of European security assistance into a potential contributor to the Common Security and Defence Policy. Although Armenia will most probably participate in civilian missions, this step demonstrates the country's willingness to contribute to European security. Last but not least, Armenia is also engaged in Security Sector Reform and Governance (SSRG) programmes aimed at strengthening the country's institutional capabilities.

A Changing Security Environment

Armenia's wider security environment has also changed in ways that bear directly on its European path. On 8 August 2025, Armenia and Azerbaijan initialled a peace agreement at the White House, along with arrangements for the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), which links Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan through Armenian territory. The agreement has not yet been signed or ratified, and Baku links its signature to changes in Armenia's constitution. Normalisation with Türkiye has advanced — direct trade restrictions were lifted in May 2026 and border infrastructure has been upgraded — although the land border has not yet opened. At the same time, Armenia has frozen its participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and in August 2026 the Prime Minister said publicly that he would welcome the organisation removing Armenia from its ranks. Each of these developments reduces Armenia's dependence on Russian security guarantees; each also gives Moscow new grievances to exploit.

Institutional and Economic Cooperation

CEPA, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, represents the legal framework governing the relationship between Armenia and the European Union across several fields, including trade, energy, democracy, and the rule of law. The agreement was signed in 2017 and fully entered into force in 2021. In addition to CEPA, the European Union allocated €270 million through the Resilience and Growth Plan in 2024 to support reforms, sectoral cooperation, transport connectivity, and energy. In addition, the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) aims to mobilise up to €2.6 billion for infrastructure, digitalisation, business development,

and connectivity. On 2 December 2025, the new Strategic Agenda for the EU–Armenia Partnership was adopted at the 6th EU–Armenia Partnership Council, aiming to deepen cooperation across a wide range of fields, including the economy and security. In 2026, the European Union allocated an additional €143 million for multi-sector budget support and technical assistance.

The Eurasian Economic Union Question

Any assessment of Armenia's accession prospects has to address the country's membership of the Eurasian Economic Union, which Armenia joined in 2015 after setting aside an already negotiated Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013. Because the EAEU operates a common external tariff, its membership cannot be legally reconciled with accession to the EU customs union. This is now acknowledged openly in Yerevan: Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan stated in May 2026 that the two memberships are incompatible, and Prime Minister Pashinyan confirmed in August 2026 that simultaneous membership is impossible. In May 2026, the EAEU declared that Armenia's westward course posed risks to the union's economic security and called on Armenia to hold a referendum on the choice "as soon as possible"; a report on the consequences of suspending Armenia's membership is due at the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in December 2026. Moscow has added direct pressure: in May and June 2026 Russia banned imports of Armenian mineral water, wine, brandy and a range of agricultural and fish products, while Russian officials warned of consequences for Armenia's preferential energy supplies.

The economic exposure behind this question is considerable: Russia accounted for almost 36% of Armenia's goods trade in 2025, against some 11% for the European Union, and Russian companies retain ownership of significant energy and rail infrastructure. This is the principal structural difference between Armenia's position and Georgia's, and it means that the sequencing of Armenia's European path will necessarily differ from the Eastern Partnership template. For Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the sequence ran from an Association Agreement with a DCFTA, through visa liberalisation, to a membership application and candidate status. Armenia cannot follow that order: a DCFTA is incompatible with membership of the EAEU customs union, and CEPA was designed precisely to avoid that conflict. Armenia may therefore have to apply for membership, and build its economic alternatives, before it can negotiate a free trade area with the EU — reversing the order in which the political and trade pillars were built elsewhere. It complicates that path without closing it. Armenia's candour about the incompatibility is itself an asset, since it allows the question to be sequenced deliberately rather than forced; and recent economic pressure on Armenian exports has strengthened, not weakened, the case in Yerevan for diversification. The practical task is to build the alternative — market access, transport corridors and export diversification — before the choice becomes unavoidable rather than after.

Economic relations between Armenia and the European Union have also deepened in recent years. Besides financial assistance and regulatory approximation under CEPA, both sides have increasingly focused on connectivity, infrastructure, business development, and the gradual diversification of Armenia's economic relations.

Another important development concerns the Autonomous Trade Measures (ATMs), given final approval by the Council on 24 September 2026 as a temporary response to Russian trade restrictions affecting Armenia's exports. For two years, they suspend EU import duties on around 80% of Armenian exports. Although the ATMs facilitate access of selected Armenian products to the European market, they should rather be understood as a temporary trade support mechanism than as a long-term instrument of economic integration or a substitute for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

Cooperation has also expanded in education, research, and people-to-people contacts through programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe.

Visa Liberalisation Dialogue

The Visa Liberalisation Dialogue, launched in 2024, represents another important milestone in EU–Armenia relations. If the benchmarks of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan are fulfilled, the process could eventually allow Armenian citizens to travel visa-free to the Schengen Area. The dialogue includes reforms targeting border management, biometric passports, data protection, anti-discrimination measures, migration policy, the fight against organised crime and corruption, as well as cooperation in the fields of police and justice. According to statements by Armenian officials, the process could be completed within the next few years. However, the timeline will depend on the implementation of the required reforms and the assessment of the European Union.

High-Level Political Dialogue

Political dialogue between Armenia and the European Union has intensified considerably over the past years and has been accompanied by a growing number of high-level meetings. On 5 April 2024, a high-level meeting was held between Armenia, the United States and the European Union, bringing together Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. During the 6th EU–Armenia Partnership Council, chaired by Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and High Representative Kaja Kallas, both sides formalised the new EU–Armenia Partnership Agenda.

The 8th European Political Community (EPC) Summit, bringing together more than forty heads of state and government, as well as senior European officials, took place in Armenia on 4 May 2026. The inaugural EU–Armenia Summit was held the following day, during which Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, and

President of the European Council António Costa signed the EU–Armenia Connectivity Partnership.

Other important high-level meetings include the leaders' meeting in Brussels in July 2025, as well as the visits of Ursula von der Leyen and Marta Kos to Yerevan in July 2026.

Armenia and the European Union have reached an unprecedented level of cooperation in recent years. In particular, cooperation has deepened considerably in the fields of political dialogue, security, economic cooperation, and people-to-people contacts. At the same time, Armenia has no practical experience with the EU accession process. In this regard, the experience of countries already engaged in the accession process, particularly Georgia, provides valuable insights into both the opportunities and the possible challenges Armenia may face on its European path.

Challenges For Armenia's EU Integration Aspirations

Armenia's European integration aspirations face considerable challenges arising from both the evolving political environment within the European Union and broader geopolitical uncertainties. The growing influence of populist and right-wing political forces across EU member states, increasing political polarization, and debates over migration, national sovereignty, and institutional reform could complicate consensus on future EU enlargement and weaken political support for admitting new members. At the same time, Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine has fundamentally reshaped the EU's geopolitical priorities, simultaneously reinforcing the strategic importance of enlargement while concentrating political, financial, and security attention on Ukraine and Moldova. These developments create additional uncertainty for Armenia, whose European aspirations must be balanced against its economic interdependence with Russia, regional security vulnerabilities, and the stalled European integration process in neighboring Georgia. This uncertainty was explicitly acknowledged by Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan during the Warsaw Security Forum on 13 October 2026, when, asked about the ultimate destination of Armenia's European integration process, he stated: "I believe no one knows. Not Armenia, not the EU, not the member states." Mirzoyan also acknowledged that serious public discussions about EU membership had only recently begun in Armenia, despite the adoption of legislation initiating the accession process in 2025. His remarks highlight the gap between Armenia's declared European ambitions and the absence of a clearly defined membership perspective. In this context, a central challenge for Armenia will be managing public expectations, sustaining political and institutional commitment to European reforms, and developing a realistic, coherent strategic communication approach that acknowledges geopolitical constraints while maintaining the credibility and continuity of its European integration agenda.

Lessons from the Georgian Experience

The most instructive comparison with Georgia begins in 2013, not 2023. In that year Armenia had a fully negotiated Association Agreement with the European Union and set it aside in favour of the Russian-led Customs Union; Georgia signed its own Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, in 2014. Over the following decade Georgia obtained visa-free travel to the Schengen Area in 2017, submitted its membership application in 2022 and was granted candidate status in December 2023, while Armenia's framework with the European Union remained CEPA — a comprehensive partnership agreement, but not an association agreement. Armenia is therefore not simply at an earlier stage of the same path: it is working to recover ground lost in 2013 under heavy Russian pressure, which is why its sequence of steps will legitimately look different from Georgia's.

The difference is visible in the legal texts. The EU–Georgia Association Agreement sets out aims that go well beyond partnership. Its objectives are to:

- promote political association and economic integration, including through Georgia's participation in EU policies, programmes and agencies;
- provide a stronger basis for political dialogue and the development of close political relations;
- contribute to the strengthening of democracy and of political, economic and institutional stability in Georgia;
- promote peace and stability regionally and internationally, including cooperation aimed at the peaceful resolution of conflicts;
- enhance cooperation in freedom, security and justice, reinforcing the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- support Georgia's economic potential, including through closer alignment of its laws with those of the EU;
- achieve Georgia's gradual economic integration into the EU internal market, in particular through a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area;
- establish conditions for closer cooperation in other areas of mutual interest.

CEPA covers much of the same political, sectoral and rule-of-law ground, but it contains neither the language of political association nor a free trade area with the objective of gradual integration into the internal market. These are precisely the elements Armenia will need to build, whether through an upgraded agreement or through the accession process itself.

Georgia's subsequent experience carries a second and more cautionary lesson: candidate status did not prove to be a ratchet. Following the adoption of the law on transparency of foreign influence, the European Council concluded on 27 June 2024 that Georgia's course amounted to

backsliding and had de facto halted the accession process; EU financial support earmarked for the defence sector was frozen, the Commission's enlargement report of October 2024 found that accession negotiations could not be recommended, and in November 2024 the Georgian government itself announced the suspension of the accession process until 2028.

Since then, the Commission has described Georgia as "a candidate country in name only" (November 2025) and, in March 2026, suspended visa-free travel for holders of Georgian diplomatic, service and official passports under the revised Visa Suspension Mechanism — a reminder that visa liberalisation, too, is conditional.

A decade of accumulated progress was reversed within roughly a year, through domestic legislation and contested elections rather than through any decision taken in Brussels. The implication for Armenia is practical: reforms to the judiciary, the electoral framework and media regulation need to be embedded institutionally, so that the European course does not rest on the outcome of a single election or on the preferences of a single political actor.

Georgia also shows the cost of Western indulgence. The country's democratic success story was tied to individual leaders, whose flaws were overlooked as long as they declared a pro-Western orientation. When public trust in those leaders collapsed, the disappointment did not stop with them: it was turned against democratic reform and against the European choice itself. The lesson for Armenia and its partners is: support for reformers must never replace scrutiny, and the European project must never become identified with a single leader or party. Today's democratic success story can become tomorrow's democratic disappointment, and the European choice pays the bill.

A third lesson concerns public opinion. For three decades Georgia cited support for European integration of around 80% as proof that its course was secure. That support proved broad but shallow. The European choice was treated as self-evident and was never seriously debated; the trade-offs of integration were rarely explained, by government or even by the civil society organisations promoting it; and instruments such as the DCFTA remained abstract promises rather than lived experience for small businesses and rural communities.

As a result, almost every hardship, from regulatory adjustment to the costs of reform, could be blamed on Europe, and claims that EU rules would destroy traditional agriculture found a receptive audience. Emotional support without understanding proved vulnerable to manipulation: informed support among 50 per cent of the population would have been a firmer foundation than symbolic support among 80 per cent. Here Armenia starts from a better position. Its society has experienced competing geopolitical choices firsthand — the 2013 reversal, EAEU membership and the failure of Russian security guarantees — and can compare

their outcomes. That experience is an asset, but only if it becomes informed conviction rather than disappointment with the alternative.

A fourth lesson concerns the methods used against the European choice. Russia's campaign in Georgia relied less on inventing grievances than on amplifying real ones: fear of war in a country that had lost every confrontation with Russia, reinforced by claims that the West wanted Georgia to open a "second front"; a "values war" portraying Europe as a threat to faith, family and national identity; and the relentless personalisation of politics around a single divisive figure. Similar vectors are already visible in Armenia — in narratives about renewed war and Western unreliability, in tensions between the government and the leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and in reported covert Russian efforts to influence the June 2026 elections.

A fifth lesson concerns the environment Armenia will encounter. Georgia's reversal has made member states more cautious about enlargement in the South Caucasus, and Armenia should expect its eventual application to be examined rigorously and on its own merits. That caution cuts both ways. It also means that a well-prepared application — accompanied by a functioning accession coordination structure, a credible programme for approximation of the acquis and a demonstrable reform record — would be received as a serious proposition rather than a declaratory one, and would stand out precisely against the Georgian comparison. Armenia enters this process with three genuine advantages: the failure modes are already documented, its society has lived through the alternatives, and the European Union has shown, in devising CEPA after 2013, that it is willing to build instruments that fit Armenia's circumstances rather than insist on a single template.

A sixth lesson concerns connectivity. Georgia's position on the main route between the Caspian and the Black Sea that bypasses both Russia and Iran has long made it valuable to the European Union: the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Southern Gas Corridor, the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway and the Middle Corridor all run through it, and the planned Black Sea submarine electricity cable to Romania would link it directly to the EU grid. This transit role helped keep European attention on Georgia, but it did not protect the accession process: geography secured engagement, not membership. Armenia's Crossroads of Peace initiative, the EU–Armenia Connectivity Partnership signed in May 2026 and the TRIPP route could give Armenia a comparable role, turning a country long kept at a dead end of regional transport into a link between the EU, Türkiye, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Connectivity is therefore a real asset in Armenia's relations with Brussels — provided it is treated as a complement to reform, not a substitute for it.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Armenia's European path is at present more advanced politically than it is legally, and the gap between the two is where the practical work lies. The following steps would narrow it.

For Yerevan, the following priorities stand out:

1. **Start the national conversation now.** Armenia has not yet submitted a formal application, and there may be good reasons to time it carefully. But the government does not need Brussels' permission to tell its own citizens, consistently and at every level, that Armenia's future lies within the European Union. The sooner this becomes a normal part of public life, the less room it leaves for manipulation. Russian displeasure should not set the pace: Moscow is already irritated, and silence will not soften its reaction. Avoid unfounded statements about possible accession dates. Georgia's repeated promises of imminent NATO membership after the 2008 Bucharest Summit created expectations the Alliance could not meet, and the resulting disappointment became one of Russia's most effective propaganda tools.
2. **Build the accession machinery.** Establish a dedicated accession coordination structure with a legal mandate and permanent staffing, capable of handling the Commission's questionnaire and of driving approximation of the acquis across ministries; the Georgian and Moldovan experience shows that this capacity cannot be improvised once an application has been lodged. Georgia offers both a model and a warning. From 2004, an Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration at the centre of government coordinated reforms across ministries, served as secretariat of a Governmental Commission on European Integration, monitored implementation of the Association Agreement through annual national action plans, and ran a dedicated EU communication strategy. When its functions were later transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, civil society organisations warned that coordination and monitoring of reforms would suffer. The lesson is that the coordinating body should sit at the centre of government with real authority over line ministries, have a permanent professional staff insulated from political turnover, be backed by a high-level interministerial commission, and report publicly against a dated national action plan. Parliament, too, needs its own capacity to scrutinise approximation legislation.
3. **Aim for informed support, not high numbers.** Approval ratings are no guarantee. Georgia is the clearest example: firm, knowledge-based support from half of society is worth more than symbolic support from four-fifths. The goal should be a public that understands what integration involves, including its costs.
4. **Engage critics and educate nationwide.** The government should not avoid sharp, critical questions but welcome them as an opportunity for dialogue. The trade-offs of integration— regulatory adjustment and new competition — should be explained openly. Educational

programmes on the EU and what integration means in practice should reach all parts of the population across the country, including rural communities, small businesses, teachers, local authorities, clergy, and the media.

5. **Sequence the Eurasian Economic Union question deliberately.** Prepare alternative market access, transport corridors and export diversification in advance, so that the eventual decision can be taken from a position of strength rather than under pressure. This should include work, starting now, on bilateral trade arrangements with Armenia's current EAEU partners to preserve free trade after an eventual exit. Georgia's experience is encouraging: its bilateral free trade agreements with Russia and other CIS states remained in force alongside the Association Agreement and the DCFTA and presented no serious obstacle up to and including candidate status; Moldova, too, has combined the DCFTA with the CIS free trade area. Armenia is itself a party to the 2011 CIS Free Trade Agreement, which offers a baseline. The limits should be recognised: Russia suspended that agreement for Ukraine in 2016 in response to its DCFTA, and all such arrangements would have to be terminated or adapted upon accession.
6. **Treat standards, not tariffs, as the real barrier.** Market access on paper is not market access in practice. Even under the DCFTA, the EU's share of Georgia's exports rose only modestly in the first years, from about 21% in 2013 to 24% in 2017. The binding constraints were not tariffs but food-safety and quality standards, the cost of certification, a shortage of accredited laboratories outside the capital, small-scale production and low awareness among producers. Armenia faces the same constraints, and the Autonomous Trade Measures will not remove them. Priorities should include accredited testing laboratories in the regions, an EU-aligned food-safety and veterinary system able to obtain EU approval for animal products, affordable certification support for small producers, and export-promotion services that help firms not only enter the EU market but stay in it. Proximity matters too: Moldova now sends more than 30% of its exports to neighbouring Romania alone. Armenia has no EU neighbour, which makes logistics through Georgia and the Black Sea, and the opening of the border with Türkiye, part of the same agenda.
7. **Deliver tangible benefits short of membership.** Progress in integration processes short of membership produces results that citizens can feel. Priorities include completing visa liberalisation; securing access to as many sectors of the EU Single Market as possible; joining the EU's "Roam Like at Home" area, which Ukraine and Moldova entered on 1 January 2026 through the internal-market provisions of their Association Agreements, after aligning their legislation with EU roaming rules — Armenia would need a comparable legal basis, either an upgraded CEPA or a dedicated bilateral agreement of the kind the Commission proposed for the Western Balkans in February 2026; and widening access to European education. EU law guarantees equal tuition fees only to EU, EEA and Swiss nationals; for Armenian students, fees are set by each member state or institution. Bilateral

arrangements with individual member states and expanded Erasmus+ scholarships are therefore the realistic route, and Austria's temporary fee exemption for Ukrainian students shows that national solutions are possible.

8. **Explain the complex instruments; visa-free travel will explain itself.** Visa-free travel needs little promotion: citizens will use it from day one. Trade instruments are different. The Autonomous Trade Measures, and any future DCFTA, will deliver only if exporters, farmers and small businesses know how to use them. Georgia's DCFTA remained an abstract promise for many of its intended beneficiaries; Armenia should invest in practical, sector-specific guidance from the outset.
9. **Make EU support visible.** Every project financed by the European Union should be clearly communicated so citizens know who stands behind the schools, roads, border posts, and businesses that benefit. Where support is invisible, others will claim the credit or deny that it exists.
10. **Lock in the reforms.** Embed the reforms on which assessment will turn — judicial independence, electoral integrity, media regulation and information resilience — through legislation and institutional design rather than political commitment alone.
11. **Continue normalisation with neighbours.** Signing the peace agreement with Azerbaijan and normalising relations with Türkiye would resonate strongly in Brussels and strengthen Armenia's case. They should not, however, be treated as preconditions for an application: Georgia obtained candidate status in December 2023 with no meaningful prospect towards deoccupation and restoration of control over the entire territory.
12. **Use connectivity as an asset, not a substitute.** Present the Crossroads of Peace initiative, the TRIPP route and the EU–Armenia Connectivity Partnership as part of the EU's own connectivity agenda linking Europe with the South Caucasus and Central Asia, and seek Global Gateway financing accordingly. Georgia's experience shows that transit value earns attention in Brussels, but not membership.
13. **Redouble efforts against Russian cognitive operations.** Treat resilience to disinformation and foreign interference as a core accession task, not a side project: build strategic communication capacity in government, strengthen independent fact-checking and media literacy, cooperate closely with the new EU Partnership Mission on hybrid threats, and remain particularly vigilant around elections. The planned referendum deserves specific preparation: Moldova's 2024 EU referendum passed with barely 50.4% of the vote amid a documented large-scale vote-buying operation.

14. **Institutionalise civil society participation and protect civic space.** Armenia should draw lessons from both the achievements and setbacks of Georgia's EU integration experience by adopting a comprehensive approach that connects civil society engagement, institutional development, and strategic communication. Georgia's experience demonstrates that

progress toward European integration requires not only political commitment and legislative alignment with EU standards but also strong democratic institutions, an independent civil society, and sustained public trust. Armenia should institutionalize meaningful civil society participation in policymaking, strengthen the independence and accountability of public institutions, and establish effective coordination mechanisms between government, civil society, and EU partners. Particular attention should be given to developing a coherent, inclusive, and evidence-based strategic communication framework that clearly explains the benefits, obligations, and challenges of European integration, counters disinformation, and engages citizens beyond Yerevan, including regional communities and vulnerable groups. Georgia's recent democratic backsliding and the resulting suspension of its EU accession progress highlight the importance of protecting civic space, maintaining institutional checks and balances, and ensuring consistency between political messaging and actual reforms.

For Brussels, the Armenian case argues for instruments that fit the circumstances rather than the template. CEPA-plus arrangements, delivery on visa liberalisation, sustained support for electoral integrity and counter-disinformation capacity, and connectivity investment can all produce tangible benefits for Armenian citizens well before questions of membership are resolved — and they are the most effective available answer to the argument that the European path offers nothing concrete. The Georgian experience suggests several further lessons for the European Union and its member states:

- **Apply conditionality early and consistently**, rather than granting status first and enforcing afterwards, and do not let a pro-European label excuse governance failures. In Georgia, years of tolerance taught political actors that declaring European aspirations mattered more than implementing them, and weakened the credibility of later warnings.
- **Calibrate communication to Armenian society.** Messages that reflect legitimate European values can still become propaganda if delivered without regard for local sensitivities. Russia's advantage in Georgia was its detailed knowledge of the country's cultural fault lines.
- **Mind the timing and coherence of incentives,** so that offers of cooperation cannot be presented as pressure or blackmail.
- **Contest the information space.** Development assistance must be accompanied by strategic communication and support for societal resilience. Constructive capital that is not defended can be neutralised by far smaller investments in destructive influence.

Approached this way, Armenia's European integration can proceed as a steady, cumulative process rather than a single decisive rupture — which, on the evidence of the past decade in the region, is much the more durable of the two.