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### ARMENIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: BETWEEN DIVERSIFICATION AND DEPENDENCE

*The structural and geopolitical barriers that limit Armenia's ability to shift its foreign policy away from Russia toward the European Union (EU) have been studied. The relevance of this study lies in understanding why, despite recent interaction with the EU – particularly via the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) – Armenia remains strategically attached to Russia. The hypothesis was tested that deep infrastructural dependence on this country, as well as institutional ties such as membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), significantly hinder Armenia's foreign policy autonomy. Qualitative analysis methods of specific cases were applied using dependency theory, based on institutional texts, trade and energy data, as well as geopolitical events from 1991 to 2023. The results of the study confirm that although EU – Armenia cooperation has deepened, particularly after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, the EU engagement remains mainly symbolic and non-military. Western actors do not offer reliable alternative security guarantees. At the same time, Russia retains the strong deterrent capabilities through economic pressure or political influence. It is concluded that Armenia's foreign policy remains structurally constrained and that a real shift away from this country, even if politically desirable, is hindered by both external and internal obstacles.*

**Keywords:** Armenia, foreign policy, CEPA, CSTO, EAEU, dependence.

### ЗОВНІШНЯ ПОЛІТИКА ВІРМЕНІЇ: МІЖ ДИВЕРСИФІКАЦІЄЮ ТА ЗАЛЕЖНІСТЮ

*Досліджено структурні та геополітичні перешкоди, які обмежують здатність Вірменії змістити свою зовнішню політику від Росії в бік Європейського Союзу (ЄС). Актуальність цього дослідження полягає в розумінні того, чому, незважаючи на нещодавню взаємодію з ЄС – зокрема через Угоду про всеосяжне і розширене партнерство (СЕРА), – Вірменія залишається стратегічно прив'язаною до Росії. Перевірено гіпотезу про те, що глибока інфраструктурна залежність від цієї країни, а також інституційні зв'язки, такі як членство в Організації договору про колективну безпеку (ОДКБ) та Євразійському економічному союзі (ЄАЕС), суттєво перешкоджають зовнішньополітичній автономії Вірменії. Застосовано методи якісного аналізу конкретних випадків із використанням теорії залежності, спираючись на інституційні тексти, дані про торгівлю та енергетику, а також геополітичні події з 1991 по 2023 р. Результати дослідження підтверджують, що, хоча співпраця між ЄС та Вірменією поглибилася, особливо після війни у Нагірному Карабасі 2020 р., участь ЄС залишається переважно символічною та невійськовою. Західні гравці не пропонують надійних альтернативних гарантій безпеки. Водночас Росія зберігає потужний потенціал стримування через економічний тиск або політичний вплив. Зроблено висновок, що зовнішня політика Вірменії залишається структурно обмеженою, а реальному відходу від цієї країни, навіть якщо він є політично бажаним, перешкоджають як зовнішні, так і внутрішні перепони.*

**Ключові слова:** Вірменія, зовнішня політика, ЦЄПД, ОДКБ, ЄАЕС, залежність.

JEL Classification: F14, F15, F42, H56, O19.

### Introduction

Since gaining independence in 1991, Armenia has developed a close relationship with Russia, especially in the areas of economics, security, and politics. This country traditionally has been Armenia's main security guarantor and energy supplier. Armenia's membership in the Collective Security



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Treaty Organisation (CSTO) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, n. d.) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Eurasian Economic Commission, n. d.) has further deepened its structural ties with the capital of this country.

At the same time, Armenia has gradually developed its relationship with the European Union (EU). In 2017, they signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which reflected Armenia's willingness to align with EU standards, especially in areas such as legal reform, public administration, and trade, even though Armenia was not pursuing membership (European Union & Republic of Armenia, 2018, January 26). This cooperation has not replaced Russia but coexists with it, which produced a complex dual-track foreign policy (Poghosyan, 2018, February 15).

However, recent geopolitical developments around Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) have shown the fragility of the historic alliance with Russia. Azerbaijan's military victory in 2020 dramatically shifted Armenia's regional position (Bowen, 2020, December 23, p. 12). In 2022, Azerbaijan attacked Armenia, and in 2023, relaunched an offensive in NK, which led to the mass displacement of its Armenian population despite the presence of Russian peacekeepers. In both cases, the CSTO or Russia remained silent, resulting in growing anti-Russian sentiment in Armenia, undermining its role as a reliable security partner (Broers, 2022, September 21; Hedenskog, 2023, October 10). These events and the Russia-Ukraine war have accelerated geopolitical instability in the South Caucasus and prompted Yerevan to reconsider its strategic orientation. In response, Armenia has sought to diversify its partnerships, particularly with the EU (de Waal, 2024, July).

This paper uses dependency theory to analyze the limitations of Armenia's foreign policy autonomy. The theory suggests that structural reliance on a dominant partner can restrict a smaller state's ability to choose independently (Oyetunde, 2022, August 17). In the case of Armenia, despite increased cooperation with the EU, dependence on Russia continues to shape its orientation. This theoretical lens helps explain why Armenia's foreign policy recalibration remains constrained by structural factors.

The hypothesis of this paper is that despite Armenia's efforts to stand closer to the EU, its strategic choices remain constrained by deep dependence on Russia, which is examined through qualitative analysis of institutional agreements, trade data, media news, and geopolitical events from 1991 to 2023.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 1 outlines the evolution of Armenia's dual alignment. Section 2 highlights the constraints that limit policy diversification. Section 3 evaluates the limitations of the EU's role as an alternative partner and the geopolitical risks. And Armenia's foreign policy diversification challenges and limitations are concluded in the last section.

Accordingly, this study addresses two core questions:

1. How does Armenia balance its foreign policy between Russia and the EU?
2. What structural and geopolitical constraints limit Armenia's ability to shift away from Russia?

## 1. Between russia and the EU: Armenia's Dual Alignment

Since gaining independence in 1991, Armenia has pursued a multi-vector foreign policy to maintain balanced relations with russia, Iran, and Western countries. However, due to its unfavorable geography, the NK crisis, and the border closure by Turkey, Armenia had to align more closely with russia to counterbalance the Azerbaijan-Turkey alliance.

Diplomatic relations between Armenia and russia were established in 1992 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 2023, April 5). In 1995, Armenia authorized the establishment of russia's 102nd military base in Gyumri (Poghosyan, 2020, p. 16). In 1997, both states signed the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, which became the cornerstone of the partnership. This framework includes about 200 bilateral agreements, indicating the institutional depth of Armenia's alignment with russia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 2023, April 5).

Armenia's dependence deepened further after putin's rise to power. In 2002, Armenia officially joined the CSTO, a military alliance providing mutual defense guarantees under Article 4, which mirrors Article 51 of the UN Charter (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, n. d.). Under this umbrella, Armenia established a joint air defense system with russia and authorized the troops of this country to guard its borders with Turkey and Iran. Then, russia gradually gained control over key Armenian infrastructure, including the railway system, energy distribution networks, and gas sector (Poghosyan, 2020, pp. 15–16). Giving russia access to its strategic assets has reduced Yerevan's ability to maneuver independently in foreign policy – an outcome that aligns with dependency theory.

In 2015, Armenia joined the russia-led EAEU, deepening economic alignment with this country as the EAEU promotes the free movement of goods, capital, and labour among member states and coordinates policies across key sectors (Eurasian Economic Union, n. d.).

Simultaneously, Armenia strived to strengthen its relationship with the EU.

The EU and Armenia signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1996, creating a foundation for political and economic cooperation. Then Armenia joined the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and became an active member of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009, receiving substantial technical and financial support for reforms (Aleksanyan, 2023).

Between 2010 and 2013, Armenia and the EU negotiated an Association Agreement (AA) that included provisions for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

However, in September 2013, just a few days before signing the AA, Armenia reversed course under russian pressure and announced its decision

to join a russian-led customs union (the precursor to the Eurasian Economic Union). This decision made the DCFTA legally incompatible (Ghazaryan & Delcour, 2017; Poghosyan, 2020, pp. 19–20).

Despite this U-turn, both sides renewed cooperation and signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement in 2017. CEPA was ratified in 2018 and entered into force in 2021 (European External Action Service, 2021, February 28). It replaced the PCA and remains the foundation of EU-Armenia relations, aiming to foster institutional reform, regulatory alignment, political dialogue, and the rule of law. It also encourages mobility, trade harmonization, and governance improvements (European Union & Republic of Armenia, 2018, January 26).

Post-2020 regional developments significantly altered Armenia's foreign policy alignment. Russia's failure to prevent the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, its muted response to Azerbaijani aggression in 2022, and its inaction during the 2023 crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh weakened Armenia's trust in this country as a reliable partner (Hedenskog, 2023, October 10). In response, Armenia accepted the deployment of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMA) in October 2022, marking the EU's first physical presence in Armenia's security space (European External Action Service, n. d.).

This presence is symbolically significant but, at the same time, underscores the limitations of EU engagement in the region. Although EU-Armenia ties have deepened, structural dependencies continue to constrain Armenia's ability to pivot away from Russia. The following section explores the economic and security dimensions of these constraints.

## 2. Structural Constraints: Armenia's Economic and Security Dependencies

After 2020, Armenia has shown a greater interest in diversifying its international cooperation. However, its ability to shift away from Russia remains limited because of deep-rooted dependencies, particularly in the economic and security spheres. These dependencies are essential for understanding the constraints of Armenia's foreign policy and geopolitical flexibility.

### 2.1. Economic dependencies

Following the war-driven closure of Armenia's borders with Azerbaijan and the loss of key transit routes through Georgia due to the Georgian-Abkhazian war in the early 1990s, Russia emerged as Armenia's most vital economic partner, supplying raw materials, armaments, and strategic goods (AGBU, 2023, July 18). Turkey's closure of its border with Armenia in 1993 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n. d.) further deepened its geographic isolation, leaving it heavily reliant on Moscow for access to global markets.

This reliance was later institutionalized through Armenia's accession to the EAEU in 2015, granting tariff-free access to the russian-led common market. In the context of russia's growing international isolation due to Western sanctions, Armenia has become an increasingly significant trade partner for moscow (de Waal, 2024, July). Trade between the two countries has surged in recent years. Armenia's exports to russia reached approximately USD 3.54 billion in 2023-representing a fivefold increase compared to 2020 (ArmStat, 2024). Broader trade turnover, including imports, surpassed USD 7.3 billion (Mgdesyan, 2024, May 9). By contrast, Armenia's trade with the European Union in 2023 stood at only USD 710 million, highlighting the persistent imbalance in its foreign economic relations (*Figure 1*).

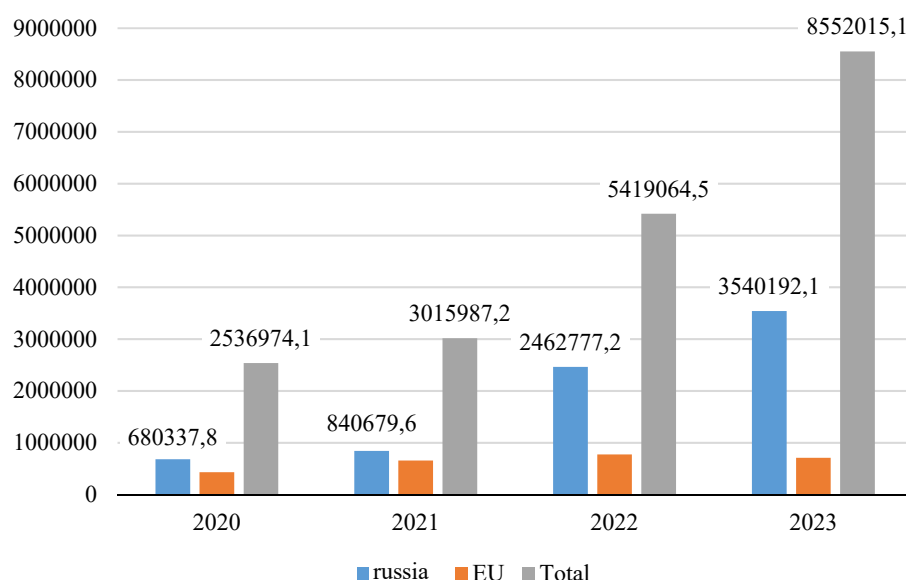


Figure 1. Armenian exports to russia and the EU, 2020–2023 (USD thousand)

Source: ArmStat (2024).

Except for trade, the russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the migration of approximately 100,000 russian nationals to Armenia. This influx, which includes mainly tech professionals and entrepreneurs, contributed significantly to economic growth, with Armenia's GDP nearly doubling between 2020 and 2023 (Poghosyan, 2023, November 6).

Remittances from russia are another critical component of Armenia's economic dependence: over 85% of all personal transfers to Armenia come from this country, which reflects the labor migration patterns. Armenia also relies heavily on russian imports. For example, 98% of the country's grain supply is sourced from russia (de Waal, 2024, July), a vulnerability that implies food security. As shown in *Figure 2*, russia consistently dominates Armenia's import flows compared to the EU.



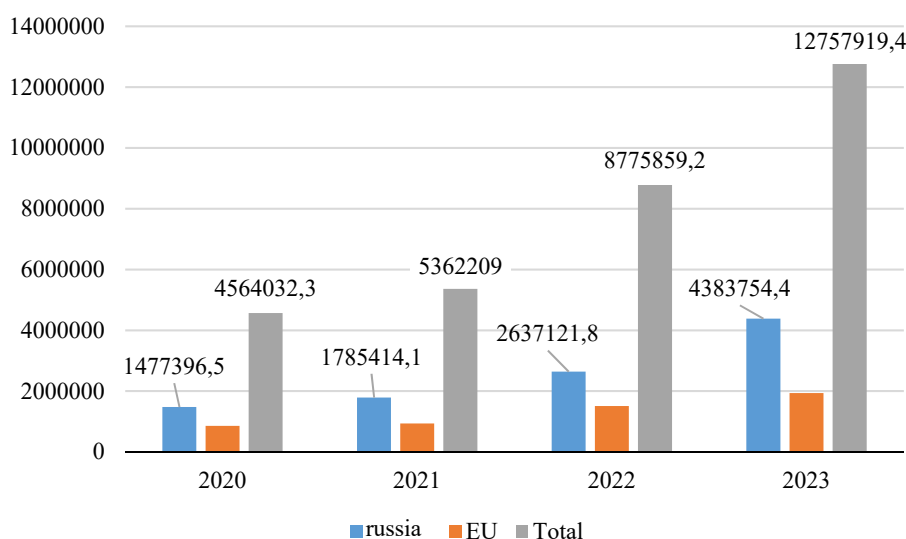


Figure 2. Armenian imports from Russia and the EU, 2020–2023 (USD thousand)  
Source: ArmStat (2024).

Armenia's apparent energy self-sufficiency, reportedly producing up to 98% of its electricity domestically (Markosyan, 2023, December 18), masks deeper structural dependencies. Much of this electricity relies on imported resources, particularly nuclear fuel and natural gas from Russia. The Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, a Soviet-era facility, supplies around 35% of Armenia's electricity (Krikorian, 2024, February 9), but it operates using Russian-supplied enriched uranium and their technology (International Energy Agency, 2022). Rosatom, Russia's state atomic energy company, oversees the nuclear sector, including fuel supply and waste disposal (Baghirov, 2024, January 4).

Meanwhile, Armenia's natural gas infrastructure is fully controlled by Gazprom Armenia, a subsidiary of Russia's state-owned energy giant. With approximately 85% of Armenia's gas imported from Russia via Georgia, the country lacks energy independence. Oil and gas imports combined account for around 77% of Armenia's total energy consumption (International Energy Agency, n. d.).

While Armenia has recently initiated efforts to develop renewable energy, such as solar and wind, these alternatives are still in early stages. The urgency of diversification has grown due to the planned decommissioning of the reactor of the Metsamor plant. The negotiations are ongoing for the latter and involve South Korea and the United States (Krikorian, 2024, February 9).

The closed borders with Armenia's neighbours, Turkey and Azerbaijan, hinder its access to alternative energy routes. While Iran provides a partial alternative for gas imports, it cannot fully replace Russia's dominant role due to infrastructural limitations and geopolitical constraints (CivilNet, 2025, February 12).

These economic and energy limitations highlight the structural constraints outlined in dependency theory. Armenia's reliance on Russia for energy and infrastructure restricts its foreign policy flexibility despite its wish for deeper integration with Western countries.

## 2.2. *Security dependencies*

Since gaining independence, Armenia's national security strategy has been almost entirely shaped by its long-running conflict with Azerbaijan. Driven by this conflict, newly independent Armenia became one of Russia's closest allies, joining the CSTO and tying its foreign and security policies to the capital of this country (de Waal, 2024, July).

Russia's military presence in Armenia, joint border protection and joint air defense system, as well as subsidized arms transfers, strengthened Armenia's dependence on this country and limited its defense autonomy, hindering its efforts to form alternative security partnerships.

Armenia's dependence on Russia increased due to unofficial arms embargoes from the EU, the US, and Canada, which prohibited access to Western suppliers. In addition, recommendations by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) against supplying arms to conflict zones have further tightened Armenia's defense options.

In the meantime, Azerbaijan successfully diversified its defense system in collaboration with Israel and Turkey. Armenia leaned only on Russia due to the ongoing conflict and the absence of viable Western alternatives. (Arakelyan et al., 2024).

However, the inaction of the CSTO and the Russian peacekeeping mission during Azerbaijan's post-2020 aggression and its military takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 exposed the risks associated with Armenia's overdependence on Russia and the CSTO for its security (Pilibossian & Nersisyan, 2024, December 17).

These events underscored the urgency of developing new strategic partnerships beyond Moscow. In addition, the war in Ukraine diverted the Kremlin's attention and influence from the region, opening a window for Armenia to explore new defense alignments with Western partners (Mammadova, 2024, April 8). Thus, Armenia has taken steps toward diversification through closer cooperation with Western institutions and arms deals with France and India (Chukhuran et al., 2024, July 31).

Despite these developments, Armenia's strategic reorientation remains largely symbolic.

Russian military base, binding CSTO obligations, economic interdependence, and an Armenian diaspora residing in Russia. The latter highlights how structural dependency can limit, in this case, Armenia's autonomy.

## 3. Why diversification remains Incomplete: limits of EU support and geopolitical risk

While Armenia continues to deepen its ties with the EU, its foreign policy reorientation is still largely symbolic. Several interrelated factors

hinder its reorientation, including Armenia's structural dependence on Russia, limited EU engagement, and an unstable regional and domestic environment.

Structural dependence is the most challenging obstacle to diversification. As mentioned before, Russian state-owned enterprises control the important sectors of Armenia, such as gas and wheat imports (de Waal, 2024, July; Baghirov, 2024, January 4). These dependencies can be coercive. Any decisive effort by Armenia to shift away from Russia presents a risk of severe retaliation. This country has numerous means to press Yerevan, including giving the green light to Azerbaijan to launch another military operation, cease natural gas exports to Armenia, or deport ethnic Armenians from Russia (Zolyan, 2023, November 27). Russia can also close the Upper Lars checkpoint, Armenia's main land route to this country, which would disrupt Armenia's ability to import and export goods to its largest market.

Institutionally, Armenia's membership in the EAEU reinforces this dependency as it makes incompatible free trade agreements with the EU (von Essen & Hedenskog, 2024, December 4; NEWS.am, 2025, January 14). Trying to exit from EAEU may expose Armenia to significant vulnerabilities, including losing tariff-free access to the Russian market and increased prices for critical goods such as natural gas and foodstuffs. For a small, landlocked country with closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan, the threat of Russian retaliation presents a serious hindrance to strategic reorientation, even when such a shift is politically desirable.

Except for the constraints imposed by Russia's dominance, there are constraints shaped by the EU's limited capacity and strategic caution. The relations between the EU and Armenia have been steadily improved in recent years, yet key limitations remain. CEPA represents the EU's most ambitious institutional agreement with Armenia. However, it does not include any binding security guarantees or imply a path to EU membership. Armenia is a reform partner rather than a strategic ally. While Article 5 refers to foreign and security policy dialogue, this cooperation is framed around shared norms, not mutual defense. The deployment of EUMA underscores the EU's willingness to engage symbolically, but its non-military nature highlights the structural limits of the EU as a reliable security provider during conflict (European Union & Republic of Armenia, 2018, January 26).

This limited scope of EU engagement is not only a matter of political choice but it reflects deeper internal structural constraints. One such constraint is geopolitics – Russia's influence continues to deter the EU from deepening its engagement in the eastern neighborhood. The EU's cautious posture also stems from its experience with the Greek financial collapse, which negatively impacted other member countries. (Hovhannisyan, 2023).

Beyond external constraints, the regional and domestic environment also complicates Armenia's diversification attempts. Regional instability driven by unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan creates a fragile security environment that drains state resources and increases political uncertainty. These conditions affect the speed and direction of Armenia's pivot away from



russia, limiting its room for manoeuvre. Armenia's potential shift toward Europe is hampered also by domestic obstacles, especially its stalled reform process, insufficient public support for closer ties with the EU, and difficult economic and political circumstances EU (von Essen & Hedenskog, 2024, December 4).

### Conclusion

This paper examined challenges and limitations of Armenia's foreign policy diversification, its relations with russia and the EU by addressing two central questions: How does Armenia balance its foreign policy between the EU and russia, and what structural and geopolitical constraints limit Armenia's ability to diversify its foreign policy away from this country?

In regard to the first question, the findings demonstrate that Armenia adopts a dual-track approach. This means that while maintaining strategic ties with russia, it is gradually implementing reforms according to the CEPA agreement.

Regarding the second question, the study shows that Armenia remains deeply dependent on russia, particularly in important economic, energy, and security areas. In order to reduce this dependence, Armenia needs to allocate significant time, focus on institutional reforms and engage in strategic planning. Although EU – Armenia collaboration is growing steadily, CEPA, does not provide security guarantees or a pathway to membership. The EU's support has been symbolic, limited to a non-armed civilian mission (EUMA), which is a positive step for bilateral relations. Although EUMA has had a positive impact on border monitoring, it does not provide what Armenia needs to reduce Armenia's reliance on russia.

The paper applied dependency theory to explain how small states like Armenia face structural limitations in achieving foreign policy autonomy. These limitations are not only economic or security-related but also institutional and geopolitical. Therefore, while Armenia's westward orientation is politically desirable, a genuine shift will depend on long-term domestic reforms and credible external support, neither of which is guaranteed in the near future.

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