



## Strategic Corridors, Strategic Blind Spots: The EU and the New Eurasian Connectivity Race

Elena Cătălina ȘTEFĂNESCU<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Phd Candidate, SNSPA, Romania, [catalinastefanescu100@gmail.com](mailto:catalinastefanescu100@gmail.com)

**Received:** 9 February 2026

**Revised:** 13 March 2026

**Accepted:** 01 April 2026

**Available online:** 02 April 2026

### Suggested citation

E. C. Ștefănescu. "Strategic Corridors, Strategic Blind Spots: The EU and the New Eurasian Connectivity Race", *Research and Science Today*, vol. 2026, no. 1, art. no. 17.2026, pp. 1–27, 2026, doi: 10.38173/RST.2026.1.17.

### Abstract

The growing competition over Eurasian transport corridors has turned connectivity into a central arena of geopolitical influence rather than a purely economic undertaking. Using a geopolinomic perspective that integrates geopolitical, economic and infrastructure lenses this article assess the European Union's role in the emerging corridor race across South Caucasus and Central Asia. It argues that the EU risks having strategic blind spots when it treats connectivity through a regulatory, normative or enlargement-centred lens. Focusing on corridor dynamics involving Armenia and Georgia, the paper demonstrates how external power projections and shifting regional alignments shape both the viability and political meaning of connectivity initiatives. It further contends that suspending political engagement due to divergences over enlargement criteria weakens the EU's capacity to act as a credible strategic stakeholder. The article concludes that the EU should adopt a more explicitly geopolitical mindset toward connectivity in order to maintain relevance in the evolving security landscape.

**Keywords:** *Connectivity, TRIPP, Middle Corridor, EU, South Caucasus, Central Asia.*



## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, trade has evolved along established transport routes that served purposes far beyond the simple movement of goods. These routes functioned as vital arteries of interaction, facilitating the exchange of ideas, technologies, cultures and political influence. Ancient networks such as the Silk Road [1], the Amber Routes [2], the Incense Route [3], the Trans-Saharan trade routes [4], and the Maritime Spice Routes [5] functioned as early economic corridors that shaped the political, urban and cultural landscapes of entire regions. Along these routes cities such as Venice, Constantinople or Alexandria have emerged as hubs whose prosperity derived from their position as intermediaries of trade and cultural exchange. These corridors facilitated not only commerce but also political cooperation, technological diffusion and civilizational contact. Control over key nodes like ports, mountain passes, river crossings and caravan cities became a strategic priority for empires and great powers, as access to trade routes translated directly into wealth and influence [6]. This is why some cities or communities that have geographical proximity to trade routes have also experienced security challenges.

Access to the sea or major trade routes has long shaped state power. Maritime states gained influence by controlling sea lanes and ports, while landlocked states faced higher costs, dependence on neighbors, and weaker global integration. As a result, history has seen ongoing competition for access to transport routes and strategic corridors, from Russia's enduring pursuit of access to warm-water ports [7], to Central Europe's reliance on rivers like the Danube, and modern efforts by landlocked states to overcome geographic constraints.

This geopolitical logic has re-emerged with renewed intensity in recent years, as large-scale initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) [8], the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC) [9], the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route or “Middle Corridor” [10], and the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) [11] reflect intensifying competition to establish strategic connectivity corridors linking regions, markets and supply chains.

While major powers increasingly treat connectivity corridors as instruments of geopolitical influence, the European Union's approach to this emerging competition remains comparatively fragmented and reactive. Despite being one of the world's largest trading blocs and a central node in global supply chains, the EU has often framed connectivity primarily through the lenses of economic cooperation, regulatory alignment and development policy rather than as a strategic domain of geopolitical competition. This article argues that such an approach reflects several strategic blind spots in the EU's interpretation of regional realities and connectivity. Within the scope of this article, “blind spots” refer to persistent gaps in perception and analysis that lead policymakers to overlook or misinterpret critical dynamics shaping connectivity. Drawing on insights from scholars such as Robert Jervis [12] and Richard K. Betts [13], these blind spots can be understood as the product of entrenched assumptions, cognitive biases, and institutional routines that filter how information is processed. As a result, decision-makers may fail to recognize the strategic significance of emerging patterns, alternative actor motivations, or unintended consequences, even when relevant information is available. Against this background, the article addresses three main research questions: (1) Does the European Union exhibit strategic blind spots in its approach to connectivity corridors in South Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe? (2) How do institutional structures, policy framing, narratives and geopolitical context contribute to the EU's strategic blind spots in its approach to connectivity? (3) How do these limitations affect the EU's ability to respond to the growing global competition over connectivity? To answer these questions, the article is structured into two main parts. The first chapter introduces the theoretical and analytical framework of geopolinomics, drawing on well-established concepts in the literature. The



second chapter focuses on identifying the EU's blind spots and assessing their consequences through a two-stage analysis that echoes the second and third research questions. First, it examines how institutional structures and policy framing contribute to these blind spots, with particular attention to the EU's institutional arrangements and its choice of instruments for interconnectivity, especially the Global Gateway. Second, it explores how geopolitical realities and dominant narratives reveal cognitive biases in EU policymaking, as well as the Union's political and strategic positioning in response to emerging regional dynamics. In this context, the analysis highlights the Middle Corridor and TRIPP projects, with a specific focus on the EU's relations with Georgia and Armenia, demonstrating how structural, operational, and political factors alongside entrenched narratives, dominant imaginaries, and failures to adapt strategic vision, produce strategic blind spots that limit the EU's effectiveness in promoting regional connectivity and safeguarding its interests.

By examining the EU's evolving connectivity agenda within the wider geopolitical landscape of corridor competition, this article contributes to analytical debates on the strategic role of infrastructure and transport networks in contemporary international politics, while highlighting the gaps in the EU's approach and the risks these omissions entail.

### **BEYOND GEOPOLITICS: A GEOPOLINOMIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE EU'S STRATEGIC BLIND SPOTS**

Geopolinomics is advanced in this article as an emerging analytical framework for examining how territorial arrangements, economic structures, and discursive constructions jointly shape contemporary geopolitical competition. The term 'geopolinomics' was first conceptualised in 1994 by George Demko and William Woods as an analytical tool to explain policy issues confronted by the post-Cold War world [14]. While the concept remains underdeveloped in the literature and lacks a consolidated definition, this article employs the concept in dialogue with the established theoretical traditions from which it draws. The concept builds on three main strands of scholarship. First, classical geopolitics, associated with thinkers such as Friedrich Ratzel, Halford Mackinder, and Nicholas Spykman, foregrounded the role of territory, spatial positioning, and strategic control in shaping global power relations [15]. Second, world-systems theory and hegemonic cycle analysis, developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi, shifted the analytical focus toward long-term dynamics of capital accumulation and the hierarchical organisation of the global economy [16]. Third, the literature on geoeconomics and economic statecraft, advanced by Edward Luttwak and later by Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris, conceptualises the strategic use of economic instruments, such as trade policy, investment flows, sanctions, and infrastructure financing, as tools of geopolitical competition [17]. Geoeconomics and economic statecraft conceptualise the economy as an instrument of state power. In contrast, geopolinomics adopts a relational ontology in which territorial configurations, economic networks, and discursive practices are understood as mutually constitutive dimensions of power [14]. Rather than asking who controls strategic territories and spaces, how the global economy is hierarchically organised and evolves over time, or how states deploy economic instruments to achieve geopolitical objectives, geopolinomics shifts the analytical focus to a different level. It asks how economic infrastructures, spatial configurations, and legitimating narratives interact to produce and sustain the very conditions under which geopolitical competition unfolds.

This shift entails two key analytical extensions. First, geopolinomics foregrounds the spatial embeddedness of economic processes, emphasising the role of infrastructure corridors, logistics networks, and strategic nodes, such as ports, pipelines, and digital systems, in structuring geopolitical relations. Power, in this perspective, is not only exercised through instruments but is materially inscribed in the organization of space. Second, it incorporates a



discursive dimension, recognizing that narratives of development, sovereignty, connectivity, and integration are not merely justificatory but constitutive of the projects they accompany. Discursive frames shape both the legitimacy and the geopolitical effects of economic initiatives, enabling mobilization, generating resistance, and defining the terms of contestation [14]. What geopolitics adds, therefore, is an integrated analytical lens that captures the simultaneous operation of material, spatial, and ideational dimensions of power. This is particularly relevant in contexts characterized by overlapping forms of competition, such as the EU's Eastern neighborhood, where infrastructure development, economic integration, and competing geopolitical narratives converge. In such settings, treating geography, economics, and discourse as separable domains obscures the mechanisms through which contemporary forms of power are produced and contested.

The adoption of geopolitics as an analytical framework addresses the shortcomings of more conventional approaches in accounting for the EU's persistent blind spots within what parts of the literature describe as a "geoeconomic turn" [18], as well as in the comparatively underexplored dynamics of the connectivity race across the South Caucasus and Central Asia. While geoeconomics or economic statecraft emphasize the strategic use of economic instruments and the intentionality of state action, they tend to privilege policy design over structural context and assume a degree of coherence that is often absent in the EU's external engagement. By contrast, geopolitics conceptualizes connectivity as a spatially embedded and system-level phenomenon, in which infrastructure corridors, trade flows, political influence, and regional power configurations are co-constitutive. This shift is particularly relevant in the case of the Middle Corridor and TRIPP, where overlapping initiatives and competing actors, including China, Türkiye, Russia, the United States, produce a dynamic geopolitical-economic environment that cannot be adequately captured through tool-based or state-centric lenses.

In this context, geopolitics shifts the analytical focus from what the EU does to the system it operates in, thereby enabling a more precise diagnosis of why EU engagement often appears fragmented, reactive, and misaligned with the evolving realities on the ground. The choice of geopolitics is further grounded in a strand of literature that interprets the post-Soviet space through the long-term structural effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union [19]. In this regard, the adoption of a geopolitic lens is particularly pertinent, as scholars such as Kazi [19] explicitly mobilize this perspective to analyse the systemic transformations triggered by the Soviet Union's dissolution. Rather than approaching 1991 as a singular geopolitical rupture, this body of work conceptualizes it as the starting point of a deeper reconfiguration of spatial, economic, and political relations, giving rise to newly constituted geopolitic realms. Within this framework, the post-Soviet space is understood not simply in terms of state formation or shifting alliances, but as an evolving configuration of interconnected infrastructures, corridors, and regional interdependencies shaped by enduring structural change [19]. These processes unfolded within a prolonged and still incomplete reordering of political authority following the vacuum left by Soviet dissolution, a transformation that some scholars argue may take decades to stabilize. More than thirty years on, the persistence of regional instability, contested borders, and shifting alignments suggests that the South Caucasus and Central Asia remain in an ongoing phase of reconfiguration. This has direct implications for corridor-based analyses: rather than operating in a stable environment, connectivity initiatives such as the Middle Corridor and projects like TRIP are embedded in fluid and contested geopolitic realms.

To operationalize the concept of geopolitics at the level of empirical analysis and to concentrate on selected countries in the region, this article uses the notion of the geopolitic code [14]. Building on the concept of geopolitical codes developed by Taylor



and Flint in “Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality” [20], which explain how states identify allies and adversaries and justify their strategic positioning, geopolinomic codes do not seek to replace or contradict this framework. Rather, they extend it by incorporating additional analytical dimensions. As articulated by scholars such as H. Noorali, geopolinomic codes build on the foundational insights of geopolitical codes while introducing three complementary dimensions that capture the interplay between economic structures, spatial configurations, and discursive practices [14]. First, they incorporate economic structures as constitutive elements of strategy, focusing on how infrastructure financing, corridor development, and control over strategic nodes shape state positioning. Second, they integrate spatial embeddedness, emphasising how a state’s location within networks of connectivity rather than merely territorial borders conditions its strategic options. Third, they treat discourse as a co-equal dimension, analysing how narratives of geography, sovereignty, and integration actively shape geopolitical alignments and policy choices. Where geopolitical codes ask where does a state stand, geopolinomic codes ask how do territory, economics, and narrative jointly produce and contest world order. From this perspective, geopolinomic codes do not simply describe how states position themselves; they reveal how states are embedded within, and contribute to reproducing, broader geopolinomic structures.

Building on this analytical framework, the study proceeds by first offering a concise examination of the Middle Corridor and the proposed TRIPP initiative, with particular attention to their strategic objectives, institutional configurations, and infrastructural components. It then develops geopolinomic codes for Armenia and Georgia, two countries that are central to these connectivity projects and towards which the EU has adopted differentiated approaches. Finally, it identifies the EU’s blind spots and assesses their implications through a two-step analysis of EU instruments, notably the Global Gateway, as well as the Union’s strategic lens, including cognitive biases, geopolitical narratives, and positioning, while taking into account the geopolinomic codes of both Georgia and Armenia.

### **The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route**

The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, also referred as the Middle Corridor is a multimodal transit route that effectively links China and Europe. It begins with rail connections from China to Kazakhstan at border crossings such as Dostyk or Altynkol and continues across Kazakhstan’s rail network to the port of Aktau on the Caspian Sea. From there, cargo crosses the Caspian Sea by ferry to the Port of Baku/Alat in Azerbaijan, before traversing Azerbaijan and Georgia by rail and ultimately proceeding either by rail through Türkiye into Europe or by maritime transport across the Black Sea [21]. Prior to recent geopolitical shifts, between 2019 and 2021, the Northern route via Russia and Belarus accounted for approximately 86% of China-Europe overland trade, while the Middle Corridor represented less than 1% of total traffic [21]. The outbreak of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine significantly altered these patterns, providing a substantial boost to the Middle Corridor in 2022. Compared to the previous year, trade volumes along this route increased with the most significant jump of 62% in 2024, a shift largely driven by conflict-related sanctions that redirect flows of energy and technology goods [22]. As a result, countries positioned along the corridor, most notably Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan, experienced trade growth, with increases of around 45%, 45% and 72% respectively compared to their 2019-2021 average [23]. The war against Ukraine, together with the extensive sanctions imposed on Russia and related security and insurance risks, have severely disrupted the Northern Corridor and eroded its reliability as a transit route between Europe and Asia. As a result, the Northern route long-term viability is increasingly contested among policymakers and market actors, particularly in the light of the European Parliament’s latest report on the Common Security and Defence



Policy which urgently calls on the EU and its member states to further restrict the Northern route by banning “trade and commercial activities with Russia and Belarus, particularly focusing on any potential dual-use items, as well as the transit of goods to and from the EU via their territories, and to reinforce sanctions” [24]. These combined geopolitical, legal and commercial constraints have consequently boosted the strategic relevance of the Middle Corridor which has gained renewed momentum as an alternative Eurasian connectivity route amid a rapidly changing geopolitical environment [25].

### **The Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity**

The TRIPP corridor is a strategic transit initiative designed to connect mainland Azerbaijan with its exclave Nakhchivan across southern Armenia. The first issue that emerges in analysing the TRIPP is that its recent prominence cannot be understood in isolation from broader diplomatic and geopolitical developments. In particular, renewed attention to the corridor is closely linked to the White House Summit between U.S. President Donald Trump, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, which generated momentum toward normalization of relations but without culminating in a formal peace settlement [26]. While the leaders signed a seven-point declaration reaffirming their commitment to peace, the finalisation of the process is explicitly contingent upon constitutional reforms in Armenia to remove provisions perceived by Azerbaijan as territorial claims, a step Pashinyan has indicated would follow a referendum after the 2026 parliamentary elections [27]. However, this change cannot be implemented easily, as it would first require Nikol Pashinyan to secure victory in the parliamentary elections and gain broad public support for the change; moreover, although the Armenian diaspora does not participate directly in the vote [28], its influential lobbying networks remain strongly against the idea and play a significant role in shaping the political landscape. This explains the several shifts in strategy; while the referendum was initially intended to be held in the same day with the elections, it was later postponed to a later date separate from the elections and there is now a discussion to adopt an entirely new Constitution with several changes rather than simply amending the existing one [29].

The White House Summit also resulted in several additional memoranda that embed the corridor within a broader strategic and policy framework. These included plans for a U.S.-Azerbaijan Strategic Partnership Charter, as well as U.S.-Armenia agreements on connectivity, artificial intelligence and semiconductor cooperation and energy security. Current proposals regarding TRIPP suggest the United States would act as a broker and coordinator, likely through U.S. backed firms or public-private partnerships holding long-term development and operational rights. In this framework, U.S.-linked companies would oversee design, financing and management of infrastructure while Armenia would formally retain sovereignty, with U.S. involvement intended to reduce bilateral mistrust and limit regional rival control [30]. Concrete investments have already been made outside Armenia: Azerbaijan has completed and upgraded key road infrastructure, notably the Horadiz-Jabrayil-Zangilan-Aghband highway [31] and has advanced railway reconstruction toward its western border, while Türkiye has initiated planning and preparatory work on rail links designed to connect with Nakhchivan [32].

### **Generating the Geopolinomic codes**

Geopolinomic codes help us operationalize the concept of geopolonomics at the level of empirical analysis. Building on the conceptual framework introduced earlier, this chapter applies geopolinomic codes empirically to Georgia and Armenia. The selection of Armenia and Georgia is justified by their central relevance to the Middle Corridor and the proposed



TRIPP initiative, as well as by their distinct positions in relation to the European Union's strategic engagement. Rather than treating these states as passive transit spaces or as secondary actors within broader geopolitical competition, geopolinomic codes make it possible to systematically assess how each country is positioned within, and actively engages with, evolving connectivity structures. They provide a framework for examining how infrastructure choices, external partnerships, and strategic narratives interact to produce differentiated roles, constraints, and opportunities within the Middle Corridor and the proposed TRIPP initiative. By doing so, this approach also makes it possible to bring to the surface the European Union's blind spots. It highlights the extent to which EU strategies tend to rely on standardised assumptions about regional integration and connectivity, often overlooking the differentiated positioning, constraints, and strategic agency of individual states. Following Hassan Noorali's model [14], geopolinomic codes are mapped along three dimensions: geography (material and imagined spaces), politics (spatialized practices and discursive demarcation), and economics (investments and representation of developed spaces). While these dimensions provide a structured basis for generating geopolinomic codes, it is crucial to recognize that these codes are neither static nor exclusively national. They evolve over time, operate across multiple scales, from local to global, and are inherently relational, often in competition with other codes. When a state's geopolinomic code functions effectively across economic, political, narrative, and territorial dimensions, it gains strategic flexibility, can influence connectivity patterns, and may shift regional power dynamics.

### **Geopolinomic code for Georgia in the context of the transport routes**

The geopolinomic code is derived through an analysis of the country's geographic position, prevailing imaginaries focused on location, and its political and economic dynamics. Georgia's location between the Black Sea and the Caspian region positions it as a key transit space, discursively framed as a bridge to Europe and a gateway between East and West [33]. Its strategic value derives primarily from its transit functionality and corridor role rather than from territorial depth or internal market size. Geographical imaginaries and narratives are both embedded within a broader spectrum of symbolic and discursive constructions. The Georgian imaginary is one of the oldest in the region, reflecting a long continuity of narratives that position the country at the crossroads of civilizations. For instance, the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece, set in ancient Colchis on the territory of present-day Georgia, offers an early symbolic representation of the country as a space of both strategic access and intrinsic value at the crossroads of regions [34]. In this narrative, Georgia appears not merely as a distant land, but as a destination of significance, reached through long and complex routes. Importantly, this myth originates from an external perspective, framing Georgia as a place to be accessed, connected to, and integrated to wider networks. Moreover, Medea's role in enabling Jason's success highlights that access to the region has historically depended on local actors, suggesting that external engagement is contingent upon internal confirmation. Such imaginaries are not merely cultural artifacts but contribute to the enduring construction of Georgia as a node within transregional connectivity systems.

Politically, Georgia has recently been framed as backsliding after a prolonged pro-Western orientation. Although it was granted EU candidate status in December 2023, the accession process effectively stalled in 2024 in response to a government policy trajectory perceived as diverging from the EU's founding values and principles [35]. These internal political developments undermine the credibility of Georgia's strategic orientation; however, they may also be interpreted as a transition toward a multivector foreign policy [36]. From a domestic perspective, this pivot prioritizes tangible economic benefits, such as infrastructure development and transit-related revenues, over normative alignment, potentially increasing



Georgia's openness to alternative partners and investment models that promise immediate economic returns.

Economically, Georgia has been drawing significant foreign investment thanks to a combination of rapidly improving infrastructure, strategic geographic positioning and targeted economic policy that enhances its appeal as regional business hub. The country's expanding air connectivity, with dozens of international airlines and rising cargo volumes, supports tourism and trade growth, while major international investors like Abu Dhabi Ports Group and Eagle Hills are funding large-scale logistics and real-estate projects, signaling confidence in the market's potential [37]. Georgia's port system plays a central role in its position as a logistics and transit hub on the Black Sea, linking Europe with the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The country has four active seaports: Poti, Georgia's largest and most diversified port, which handles containerized cargo, bulk goods and serves as a key node in the Middle Corridor; Batumi, which combines cargo handling with oil and petroleum products and also functions as a passenger and cruise port; Kulevi, a specialized terminal focused mainly on oil and oil product exports from the Caspian region; and Supsa, which primarily serves as an oil export terminal connected to regional pipeline infrastructure [38]. In addition, the Anaklia Deep Sea Port is under development and is intended to significantly expand Georgia's capacity to handle large Panamax and post-Panama vessels, strengthening its role in Eurasian trade [39]. However, the project has faced repeated delays and political controversy, leading to the termination of the initial consortium and leaving its future uncertain, despite renewed governments efforts to revive it with new investors. As such, Anaklia remains emblematic of both Georgia's ambitions to move up the logistics value chain and the political and financial constraints that continue to shape its transit-based development model.

The dominant development narrative emphasises logistics, connectivity and transit efficiency, coding Georgia primarily as a corridor, port and transit space. This strong dependence on external funding exposes Georgia's geopolinomic role to normative and political conditionality; consequently, when relations between the ruling government and the EU deteriorate, as is currently the case, Georgia may become more open and more exposed to alternative investments that do not entail such normative conditions.

### **Geopolinomic code for Armenia in the context of the transport routes**

Like in the case of Georgia, the geopolinomic code will be derived by analyzing the country's geographic position, its political and economic dynamics.

Armenia is landlocked and characterised by mountainous terrain with no direct access to major seas or global trade routes, which limits its role as a transit corridor [40]. Armenia is framed less as a corridor country and more as a strategic node or enclosed space shaped by security constraints. Historically aligned with Russian-led security and economic structures [41], with recent attempts at cautious diversification, Armenia is positioned as a vulnerable, security-dependent state rather than a connectivity hub. Its national imaginary is shaped less by geography and connectivity and more by narratives of survival and endurance. Foundational myths, such as those of Hayk and Bel or Ara the Beautiful, depict a people situated among competing empires that seek to dominate or absorb them, yet who resist [42]. These narratives reinforce an inward-looking, resilience-orientated identity that continues to influence Armenia's strategic positioning and its more cautious engagement with connectivity-driven frameworks.

Armenia continues to grapple with deep-rooted, long-standing and largely isolated tensions with its neighbors Azerbaijan and Türkiye, spanning diplomatic, economic and security domains. These strained relations are driven by historical conflicts, including the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute with Azerbaijan, as well as the legacy of the Armenian Genocide



and closed borders with Türkiye. These conditions have historically limited Armenia’s regional connectivity and reinforced its dependence on alliances like the one with Russia for military and economic support. In recent years, however, Yerevan has intensified diplomatic efforts to normalize relations with both Azerbaijan and Türkiye as part of its broader foreign policy shift aimed at breaking out of isolation [43].

Economically, Armenia experiences less large-scale infrastructure investment and fewer transit projects, with development centered on national resilience, diaspora capital, tourism, technology and services [44]. As a result, Armenia is coded as a peripheral, enclosed and security-burdened space, not due to lack of value but because dominant global narratives exclude it from being a hub.

Table 1. Comparing Georgia & Armenia form a geopolinomic code perspective

Dimension	Georgia	Armenia
Geographic location and imaginary	Bridge/ corridor	Landlocked
Political narratives	Instability or repivoting	Security & survival
Economic power and role	Transit structure	Limited connectivity

The analysis shows that Georgia and Armenia are embedded in fundamentally different ways within regional connectivity structures. Georgia emerges as a transit-oriented corridor state, whose strategic relevance is tied to its integration into infrastructure networks but remains dependent on external financing and political alignment. Armenia, by contrast, is positioned as a constrained and security-driven space, largely excluded from major transit routes and shaped by geopolitical isolation and limited connectivity options. These contrasting geopolinomic positions allow the analysis to move beyond generalised regional narratives and provide a more precise, state-level understanding of how connectivity is structured, contested, and unevenly distributed. In doing so, they reveal where EU approaches risk overlooking differentiated realities on the ground, thereby bringing into focus key blind spots in the Union’s strategic engagement in the region. They also reveal that the EU’s engagement with both Georgia and Armenia suffers from what could be called a teleological bias: it only knows how to relate to them as countries on a journey toward something (democratic consolidation, market integration or European norms).

### IDENTIFYING EU’S STRATEGIC BLIND SPOTS

As outlined in the introduction, this chapter seeks to identify the EU’s blind spots through a two-stage analysis that reflects the second and third research questions, namely, how institutional structures and policy framing, on the one hand, and geopolitical context and dominant narratives, on the other, contribute to the EU’s strategic blind spots in its approach to connectivity. As explained in the introduction, the chapter examines these “blind spots” as gaps in strategic perception and engagement in relation with the dynamics regarding the Middle Corridor and TRIPP.

#### Assessing EU’s Global Gateway

The first step is to analyse the EU’s institutional structures and primary policy instrument in this domain. As the EU’s flagship initiative for infrastructure and connectivity, Global Gateway, provides the main framework through which the Union conceptualizes, finances, and implements its external connectivity agenda. Analysing its underlying assumptions, priorities, and governance structure is therefore essential not only to understand how the EU approaches transit corridors, but also to identify the institutional and policy constraints that may give rise to blind spots.



“Connectivity is in the EU’s DNA” [45] yet translating this principle into coherent strategic framework has proven challenging. Before Global Gateway, the EU’s approach to transit corridors and interconnection was fragmented across multiple instruments, such as the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), primarily inward-looking, designed to strengthen the internal market, but gradually extended toward neighboring regions [46]. For the region examined in this article, the Eastern Partnership incorporated a connectivity and infrastructure component; however, its approach was primarily technical and regulatory, lacking a strategic orientation [47]. China launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, while the EU only articulated a coherent geostrategic approach to connectivity in 2021 with the July 2021 conclusions of the Council of the European Union on “*A Globally Connected Europe*” [48]. In these conclusions, the Council emphasized that ensuring a geostrategic approach to connectivity has long-term implications for advancing the EU’s economic, foreign, and development policy and security interests, while promoting EU values globally. It reaffirmed the centrality of human rights and the rules-based international order as guiding principles for implementing the EU connectivity agenda [48]. Building on this framework, the European Commission and the European External Action Service launched the Global Gateway [49]. Presented by Ursula von der Leyen as a transparent and value-driven approach, the initiative emphasizes democratic principles and high standards, such as the rule of law, human rights, intellectual property protection, and ethical financing designed to avoid unsustainable debt and dependency [50].

In contrast to other connectivity initiatives such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative, which place less emphasis on normative conditionality, the Global Gateway seeks to embed infrastructure cooperation within a broader framework of governance and values. Nevertheless, it has often been interpreted as the EU’s strategic response to China’s expanding infrastructure diplomacy, a point emphasized in the 2026 European Parliament report on Global Gateway [51] reflecting the Union’s growing ambition to act as a geopolitical and geoeconomic actor in an increasingly competitive and fragmented international order. Yet this ambition is difficult to reconcile with its values-based agenda, particularly in complex regions such as Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where states operate under diverse strategic cultures and sometimes different value systems. At the same time, EU-promoted standards and norms have generated asymmetrical dynamics, as partner countries frequently have limited influence over their formulation and the conditions attached to their adoption [52].

Global Gateway is implemented with a Team Europe approach which means working together (EU, EU member states, including their implementing agencies and public development banks, as well as European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and pooling resources and expertise to deliver a greater impact [53]. But the capacity of national investment banks and equivalent institutions across EU member states varies significantly which constrains the scale, speed, and strategic impact of Global Gateway co-financed projects. Diverging national priorities, such as differing economic interests in the region, or varying risk appetites for long-term infrastructure can produce compromises in project selection, financing, and strategic focus. Reliance on pooled financing can also favor smaller, lower-risk projects over strategically critical but higher-risk initiatives. These institutional and operational gaps generate EU strategic blind spots by obscuring the full geopolitical and economic significance of connectivity projects and limiting the Union’s ability to anticipate rival influence, respond flexibly, or maximize long-term strategic gains.

Another challenge for Global Gateway stems from the proliferation of national connectivity initiatives, such as Italy’s Mattei Plan, which reflect individual member states’ distinct strategic priorities, resource allocations, and geopolitical agendas [54]. While these



initiatives are often presented as aligned with Global Gateway in principle, in practice they can fragment Europe's external connectivity profile, create overlapping or competing projects, and complicate the EU's ability to act with a coherent strategy. This fragmentation is intensified by uneven political engagement: the actual participation of European leaders and foreign ministers at the Global Gateway Forum in 2023 was disappointing, with the notable absence of senior ministers from major states like France and Germany [55]. Although participation improved in 2025 in terms of the number of officials and partner countries represented, high-level attendance from key EU member states remained limited, highlighting a continued gap in political commitment [56]. Together, the multiplicity of initiatives and variable engagement contribute to weakening a unified European brand, and allowing member states' bilateral agendas to outpace or diverge from a clearly defined, Union-wide approach to connectivity and influence abroad.

Another problem of the Global Gateway lies in its inherently conflictual design and financial structure. In 2021, the European institutions positioned the initiative within the scope of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI–Global Europe), the EU's principal instrument for global development, neighbourhood policy, and international partnerships [57]. Under this framework, the programme is legally bound to respect the NDICI–Global Europe Regulation, which emphasizes that “the primary objective of the Union's development cooperation policy (...) is the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty,” as well as the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the 2030 Agenda [58]. Officially, embedding the Global Gateway within a development policy framework constrains its ability to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative or other large-scale infrastructure projects, because EU development finance rules prioritize poverty reduction and sustainable development over strategic or commercially driven objectives. In practice, however, many Global Gateway projects contradict this principle: the initiative often prioritizes EU corporate interests, relying on guarantees, blended finance, and loans rather than grants [57]. These contradictions, combined with the relatively modest financial envelope and limited transparency render the instrument confusing, overly bureaucratic, and prone to perceptions of double standards.

Global Gateway's financing is ambitious but constrained, creating potential gaps in coverage and speed. Between 2012 and 2024, roughly €306 million was mobilized for EU connectivity investments, of which only €28 million targeted the Eastern Neighbourhood and €48 million the Asia-Pacific region, including Central Asia. These modest allocations underscore both the limited financial scale of the initiative and the gap between the EU's ambitious Global Gateway rhetoric and its practical capacity to compete with larger infrastructure projects, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, or to effectively contribute to eradicating poverty or achieving the SDGs [49]. Against this backdrop, the EU began to recalibrate its approach. In 2025, the EU and five Central Asian countries agreed on foundational steps to develop the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor under the Global Gateway strategy, committing to mobilise approximately 10 billion EUR to enhance sustainable transport connectivity between Europe and Central Asia [59]. This shift was further reinforced on 20 October 2025, when the EU convened foreign ministers and representatives from EU Member States, Black Sea countries, the South Caucasus and Central Asia to advance a cross-regional connectivity agenda [60]. The initiative aims to link the EU with Central Asia via Türkiye and the South Caucasus by coordinating strategic investments in trade, resilient transport, energy and digital infrastructure, while promoting socio-economic development, sustainability and enhanced cooperation on security, stability and regional resilience.

The EU's growing recognition of the Black Sea, the South Caucasus and Central Asia as a single, interconnected, strategic space, represents an important and positive shift in its



external policy. By promoting interconnection across these regions through transport, energy, and digital corridors, the EU acknowledges that connectivity challenges and opportunities transcend individual countries and require a cross-regional approach. This holistic vision strengthens resilience, enhances diversification of supply chains and supports the development of alternative routes linking Europe with Asia. Reflecting this shift, in early February 2026, the European Commission published a meta-study mapping the investment needs required to rebuild and strengthen trade routes between Europe and Central Asia via the Caucasus [61]. However, while increased financing and infrastructure investments are necessary, they are not sufficient on their own. Effective connectivity also depends on a coherent political strategy that takes into account local power dynamics, unresolved conflicts, governance constraints and the strategic interests of regional actors.

Global Gateway, the EU's flagship instrument for external connectivity, paradoxically tends to amplify and expose existing weaknesses in the EU's strategic posture. Its ambition to combine development objectives with geopolitical influence creates an inherent tension: the EU seeks to position itself as a global strategic actor while remaining constrained by its traditional technocratic and rules-based approach.

This tension is further compounded by institutional complexity, coordination challenges across EU bodies and member states, and the broad, and at times ambiguous scope. As a result, Global Gateway represents an imperfect policy instrument, contributing to a fragmented and at times inconsistent approach to connectivity, marked by diffuse priorities and uneven implementation. In this way, it ultimately weakens the EU's capacity to act coherently and strategically.

### **Assessing EU's Approach to the Region: Cognitive Biases, Geopolitical Positioning and Narratives in Corridor Connectivity**

The analysis examines the current state of EU relations with Georgia and Armenia, highlighting recent shifts in emphasis among European policymakers, who appear to be reorienting their attention from Georgia toward Armenia and to promote competing narratives. It further explores the EU's assumptions and cognitive biases in its engagement with both countries, alongside a geographical, economic, and narrative analysis of the Middle Corridor and the TRIPP initiative. In doing so, the chapter also considers how these biases intersect with the EU's broader strategic priorities, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine, and how they shape the Union's approach to regional connectivity.

Giving an interview on April 28, 2025, during a visit to Prague, EU Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos remarked: "I cannot accept that we may have lost Georgia, even if the government passes laws one after another that clearly contradict European values" [62]. Several months later, during the presentation of the 2025 Enlargement Package before the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) on 4 November 2025, she indicated that Georgia is effectively no longer a viable partner, stating that "Georgia is lost" and suggesting that EU engagement and attention should instead focus strongly on Armenia [63]. Although these statements were made in the context of enlargement, they reflect a broader trend in EU policy, where a shifting focus away from Georgia appears to shape multiple dimensions of EU engagement in the region. Since Georgia refused to align with EU sanctions against Russia following the war in Ukraine and adopted legislation that EU considers incompatible to its core values and principles, political dialogue between EU and Georgia has largely ceased. In February 2026, the European Parliament's LIBE committee was notified about a European Commission delegated act which unless challenged by the Parliament enabled the suspension of the visa exemptions for Georgian diplomats, marking a further deterioration of the relationship [64]. This disengagement was already evident in October 2025,



when the EU invited all foreign ministers from the Black Sea, South Caucasus and Central Asia to a connectivity summit in Luxembourg to advance the Cross-Regional Connectivity Agenda, except Georgia's foreign minister [65]. Similarly, the EU cancelled the human rights dialogue scheduled for 21 November 2025, which was intended to take place at a technical level, further illustrating the breakdown in bilateral engagement [66]. Along the suspension of political relations, EU funding for Georgia has largely been halted across multiple instruments. In June 2024, the EU withheld €121 million in bilateral development assistance drawn from the 2022, 2023, and 2024 annual allocations, funds that had previously gone directly to the Georgian state budget and to technical assistance for government agencies [67]. Shortly after, in July 2024, the EU froze an additional €30 million earmarked for Georgia's Defence Ministry through the European Peace Facility, with the EU Ambassador to Georgia explicitly warning that "this is just the first step, there will be others" [68]. By the end of 2024, the EU confirmed it had no support programmes planned for Georgian authorities in 2025, effectively bringing new bilateral government-directed funding to zero. However, the Global Gateway flagship project list endorsed in late 2025 continues to include support for the Black Sea electricity connectivity cable crossing Georgian territory [69]. While this signals a recognition of Georgia's continued strategic relevance, supporting a limited number of flagship projects is insufficient to secure the broader set of transport, energy and digital corridors that are linked with Georgian territory. Given that Georgian territory is difficult to bypass for many strategic projects, the EU's refusal to distinguish between strategic connectivity investments, diplomatic relations and normative or accession-related conditionality limits its capacity to secure a relevant position in the region and key transit routes and weakens its overall connectivity strategy.

In addition to managing vast flows of goods between China and Europe, the EU must also consider its growing trade with India, especially following the recently finalized EU-India Free Trade Agreement, widely hailed as a "deal of all deals" [70]. While the traditional India-Europe route via the Middle East (including the maritime and land-based components of the emerging IMEC corridor) remains essential, issues related to the Suez Canal and unresolved geopolitical tensions along the Red Sea and Middle East highlight the need for a strategic alternative. In light of the recent escalation following coordinated U.S. and Israeli military strikes on Iran and Iran's widespread attacks across the Gulf and Middle East [71], which have significantly increased regional instability, there are three broad possible trajectories for the conflict: the hostilities continue for an extended period, deepening instability across the Middle East and other regions and its economic spill-overs; Iran remains governed by a political regime that is largely incompatible with EU and Western normative frameworks, and continues to pursue a confrontational foreign policy, sustaining tensions with both regional actors and the United States; or a post-conflict Iran undergoes significant political and economic transformation; in all scenarios the Middle Corridor remains very relevant for the EU. The relevance of the Middle Corridor in the first scenario can be illustrated by the reported attack on the airport in Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic [72] since this development highlights another potential vulnerability of the TRIPP corridor. Considering the reported attack, it is reasonable to assume that, if the TRIPP project were already operational, it could represent an attractive target in the event of escalating confrontation between Iran and the United States. The second scenario reflects the situation that prevailed prior to the war, in which the EU sought to avoid transit routes through Iranian territory. In the third scenario, the emergence of a sanctions-free and politically stable Iran could represent one of the most consequential geopolitical shifts in the region. Such a development would open multiple economic and connectivity opportunities, including for the European Union and its trade relations with India. In this context, shipments from India could potentially be redirected



toward the Middle Corridor, travelling from Mumbai to Iranian ports and then continuing overland through Azerbaijan toward European markets. As an economic powerhouse, the EU should pursue greater diversification of transport routes to mitigate risks, reduce dependence on single corridors and strike an effective balance between speed, cost and reliability of trade networks. This combination of reduced or even suspended funding and closed political communication creates a strategic blind spot: by disengaging politically while remaining linked to Georgia as a transit space, the EU risks to weaken its capacity to safeguard key corridors and undermines the coherence and resilience of its overall connectivity strategy.

The second blind spot identified in this article concerns the EU's assumption that countries such as Georgia can freely develop as independent democracies. This assumption fails not because Georgia (or Ukraine, Armenia or other countries in similar situations) lacks the necessary political or institutional capacity, but because no European country or democracy could realistically develop under such conditions. As Nathan Hutson puts it bluntly, "Georgia's accession to the EU is clearly a fool's errand as long as Russia holds a gun to Georgia's head" [73]. Admitting Georgia into the EU while it is compelled to make decisions under the constant threat of Russian retaliation, as is the case for many countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood, would seriously undermine the EU's decision-making system. Moreover, the idea that a loosely organised alternative opposition could somehow manage the situation more effectively, implementing all necessary reforms, neutralizing the Russian threat, recovering occupied territories or avoiding the risk of renew war is profoundly unrealistic.

The war in Ukraine serves as a critical reference point for Georgian foreign policy and the choice to not fully align with sanctions against Russia and to avoid the risk of opening a second front must be viewed through the lens of past experience. In 2008, EU and NATO were weak if not absent in Georgia's defense [74], and in 2022 their response to Ukraine's invasion was initially slow. Ukraine's survival during the early stages of the invasion was made possible in part by its size, territorial depth, and military capabilities. Georgia, by contrast, lacks these advantages. In the event of a Russian invasion its territory could be occupied within a very short timeframe [73]. Moreover, Georgia may be among the countries for which a total humiliation of Russia in the war in Ukraine would generate some additional risks. One strategy Kremlin elite might pursue to weather such a defeat would be to secure a swift military victory elsewhere to reassure domestic public opinion, and Georgia could present an easy target. Additionally, there are indications that although Georgia has not aligned itself with international sanctions regimes, it is nevertheless making efforts to avoid facilitating their circumvention. One example is the 2023 European Commission country report, which notes that Georgia has actively engaged in ensuring that its territory and legal entities registered within it are not used to bypass sanctions [75]. A further illustration is the recent decision by the European Union to remove Georgia's Kulevi oil terminal from the 20th package of sanctions against Russia [76].

Rather than assessing Georgia mainly through standard accession criteria, or the political choices of ephemeral governments, the EU should prioritize developing mechanisms to engage with Georgia and other countries with strategic relevance that find themselves in similar situations, through economic cooperation and resilience-building until credible security guarantees can be provided. Only then will the EU be in a position to properly assess whether any divergence from EU values stems from differing foreign policy alignments or from other factors. Such an approach would also help the EU avoid the perception of applying double standards, particularly given its pragmatic relations with other countries in the region and worldwide that neither fully implement human rights reforms nor fully adopt EU values.

The third blind spot identified in this article concerns the EU's assumption that disengagement from Georgia can be offset by shifting its strategic focus toward Armenia. This



tendency is suggested, sometimes more directly and sometimes more indirectly, by certain European elites and is reinforced by the noticeable redirection of EU efforts, financial support, and official visits toward Armenia. In practice, this often manifests in framing Armenia and Georgia in comparative or even antithetical terms, portraying Armenia as a model or benchmark for Georgia.

For example, during the Interparliamentary Delegation EU–Armenia meeting in March 2026 in Brussels [77], heated discussions arose over the inappropriateness of comparing the two countries. Representatives of the European Parliament’s two largest political groups, EPP and S&D, Rasa Juknevičienė and Nacho Sánchez Amor, made statements that exemplified this framing. Juknevičienė remarked: “When we look at you, it seems that Armenia is becoming the leading nation in the region on democratic development and openness. Let us look at this as an opportunity for you to lead and help Georgians get back on track, because Georgians are watching very carefully, and you are becoming an example for them” [77].

Similarly, Sánchez Amor reflected on the challenges of changing EU engagement patterns, noting: “We decided to decouple; we are not in the period when, with our colleague Kubilius, we were discussing the Trio (Associated Trio Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine)... I know how difficult it is to disengage from old relations” [77].

These interventions, that were contradicted by some other participants in the meeting, illustrate a recurring tendency among some EU elites to treat Armenia as a compensatory actor for Georgia. While often framed positively, such comparisons risk reinforcing the EU’s third blind spot: the assumption that deepening engagement with Armenia can substitute for a lack of strategic attention to Georgia. This framing is not only contrary to the official position of the Armenian government, but also overlooks the complexities of domestic priorities, historical ties, and strategic autonomy in both countries. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressed this issue directly in a speech to the European Parliament on 11 March 2026. While expressing appreciation for Georgia’s support of railway communications between Armenia and Azerbaijan, he emphasized the interdependence of EU engagement with both countries: “However, I should say frankly that the biggest problem on Armenia’s EU integration path at the moment is the frozen state of the political dialogue between the EU and Georgia. Georgia is for us a path to the European Union, and we adopted the law on launching the process of Armenia’s EU accession after Georgia was granted candidate status for European Union membership. It made Armenia’s EU membership prospects tangible, and we expect, and we request, that the constructive process between the European Union and Georgia develops. This is important for Armenia. It is just as important as for Georgia” [78].

Pashinyan’s statement highlights that EU assumptions about substitutability between Armenia and Georgia not only misrepresent regional dynamics but also risk undermining Armenia’s own strategic interests. It underscores the structural and perceptual dimension of the EU’s blind spot: by privileging Armenia as a “model” in comparison to Georgia, the EU may unintentionally create distortions in its engagement strategy and fail to support a coherent, regionally integrated approach to connectivity and reform.

Moreover, the analysis of the geopolinomic codes of Georgia and Armenia has shown that Georgia occupies a significantly more central role in regional connectivity than Armenia. Georgia’s corridor-based geography, Black Sea access and integration into key energy, transport and digital transit routes make it structurally more critical to the EU’s connectivity objectives, whereas Armenia’s landlocked position, limited transit functionality and security constraints reduce its capacity to serve as an alternative hub. Additionally, from an EU connectivity perspective, Armenia cannot serve as a substitute for Georgia, as it has been largely left out of the developments of the Middle Corridor, whose routing structurally depends on Georgia’s role as a transit state linking the Caspian to the Black Sea and onward to EU



markets. Unlike the Middle Corridor, which is already operational, the TRIPP remains mostly at a project-based stage and would require the alignments of multiple political, discursive and strategic variables to materialise. The discursive framing of the project reveals deep divergences that prevent it from being understood as a shared or neutral connectivity initiative. Competing narratives cast the corridor as a contested geopolitical and economic symbol rather than a consensual infrastructure project. These competing narratives originate in the terminology itself, where three distinct concepts applied to essentially the same transit route. The language used to describe the passage through this territory is not a matter of semantics, but one with legal and geopolitical implications.

In this sense the term “Zangezur Corridor”, evokes Azeri historical geographic and territorial claims central to Armenian concerns over sovereignty [79], “Syunik” denotes the internationally recognized administrative province of Armenia, subject to Armenian sovereignty and law [80]; and the rebranding as the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity” seeks to depoliticise the project by framing it as a technocratic, U.S. peace-oriented initiative.

The corridor would run in close proximity to Iran’s northern border, amplifying Teheran’s concerns about external influence near a strategically sensitive frontier. Moreover, Iran stands to lose relative leverage if Azerbaijan gains a direct and uninterrupted link to Nakhchivan, reducing Baku’s dependence on routes that pass through Iranian territory [81]. In this sense, governance arrangements over the corridor are not merely technical matters but central to shifting regional power balances. Moreover, as some scholars note [82], the corridor could be used by Azerbaijan to cut off Armenian- Iranian connections which explains the high-level visit of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Yerevan in August 2025, where Armenia sought to reassure Iran that it would retain control over the project [83]. From the Armenian perspective, the corridor should be accessible and generate benefits for all major regional actors [84], approach also reflected in Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s recent phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, during which trade relations were discussed among other issues [85]. However this raises a critical question as to whether the United States or the EU are willing to invest in project that could also advantage Iran, China and Russia. This tension highlights a core contradiction between Armenia’s preference for open, non-exclusive connectivity and the increasingly geopolitical logic guiding Western infrastructure investment.

A further issue arises from the border governance context. Armenia’s border with Iran is not merely a national administrative line; historically, it has been secured by Russian border guards under bilateral agreements, making it part of a wider regional security architecture [86]. It can be argued that Russian influence over TRIPP could operate across multiple dimensions, thereby weakening its prospects as a genuinely U.S.-backed connectivity initiative and potentially transforming the corridor from a strategic asset into a liability for the EU. Armenia’s rail network remains under a long-term concession to South Caucasus Railway, a Russian Railways subsidiary that retains operational control and maintenance responsibility [87]. In January 2026, Yerevan formally asked Moscow to accelerate restoration of a Soviet-era railway crossing Armenia that once linked mainland Azerbaijan with its exclave Nakhchivan and onward to Türkiye, a segment central to the U.S. TRIPP connectivity project [88]. Armenia’s leadership has signalled that, should Russia fail to restore the line promptly, Yerevan may seek to reclaim and rehabilitate it independently, reflecting growing frustration with Moscow’s leverage [89]. Without casting doubt on the intentions of the Armenian authorities or their ongoing recalibration of foreign policy toward the EU and the broader Western community, it would nonetheless be difficult to credibly assume that Russia would relinquish its influence over strategically significant infrastructure without contestation. At a



different scale, the precedent of Sevastopol port and the co consequences associated with the potential loss of Russia's control over it offers a useful point of reference [90].

Unlike Georgia, where Russian forces illegally occupy 20% of Georgian territory [91], Armenia hosts Russian troops at Yerevan's request to protect its border with Türkiye [92], a security relationship that fundamentally shapes the geopolitical risk calculus for any prospective transport route through Armenian territory because it embeds corridor infrastructure within active military and alliance dynamics that could constrain operational autonomy and access.

While acknowledging Armenia's efforts to reduce Russian influence such as gradually assuming greater control over its borders [93] and freezing its participation in the CSTO [94], it is nonetheless impossible to ignore the potential for destabilisation that such a recalibration entails, particularly given Russia's entrenched military presence and its historical sensitivity to shifts in influence.

Viewed through a geopolinomic lens [14], all these factors collectively help explain how projects such as TRIPP may introduce additional strategic risks for Armenia, instead of delivering the intended enhancement of its strategic resilience. Territorial nexus zones, such as corridors, are not inherently beneficial simply because of their geographic location; they produce value only when they align with a state's dominant geopolinomic codes, including its political orientation, security arrangements and external power relations [14]. In Armenia's case, geography alone cannot compensate for misalignment across these dimensions. While the TRIPP is framed as a peace-oriented and depoliticised connectivity initiative, its underlying logic implies a marked contraction of Russian influence in Armenia, an expansion of U.S. strategic presence, potential friction with China's regional interests and heightened uncertainty for Iran and only a limited or indirect role for the EU in shaping outcomes.

Given that Russia remains deeply embedded in Armenia's security architecture, discursive sphere and infrastructural control, this shift risks disrupting geopolitical and security codes without providing a stable alternative. As the Iran case illustrates, sanctions, external pressure, and geopolitical "othering" can neutralise even strategically located territories; similarly, attempting to reconfigure Armenia's corridor role without accounting for entrenched power structures may undermine rather than enhance its territorial capacity. In this sense, TRIPP risks becoming a destabilising nexus zone, one where misaligned geopolinomic codes generate friction, vulnerability, and external pressure rather than strategic leverage. This concern is reinforced by the Armenian Foreign Intelligence Service, whose 2026 annual report warns that "In 2026, it is highly likely that hybrid activities aiming to influence the implementation of TRIPP project will become substantially more active in Armenia. As outlined in 2025, the regional and nonregional actors targeting the project highly likely conduct partially overlapping activities, even when pursuing different objectives" [95].

All these arguments bring the analysis to a subsequent possible EU blind spot. The Union's connectivity ambitions and position regarding the shift of focus from Georgia to Armenia, and, to a significant extent, Armenia's potential European trajectory, are implicitly conditioned on the successful conclusion of a peace agreement with Azerbaijan. Yet such an agreement is itself tied to politically sensitive domestic reforms in Armenia, like the above-mentioned constitutional change that is politically difficult to deliver. In practice, this places the viability of EU connectivity planning within a framework dependent on externally mediated stability, most notably under U.S. auspices. However, from Washington's perspective, deep engagement in this process entails strategic trade-offs. The United States maintains significant partnerships with Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Israel, all of which intersect with broader regional security calculations, particularly in the context of present military attack on Iran. This raises a critical question: whether initiatives such as TRIPP are primarily conceived in Washington



as instruments of connectivity or as elements of a wider security architecture aimed at providing access, and military presence. If the latter increasingly prevails, the EU risks aligning its economic strategy with a framework whose underlying logic may be shaped by U.S. military and geopolitical considerations, potentially revealing a misalignment between European expectations and U.S. strategic intent.

Another structural vulnerability for EU is becoming visible, in connection to its wartime posture and its sustained support for Ukraine. As efforts to constrain Russia have effectively cut the viability of the Northern Corridor, the strategic landscape of Eurasian connectivity has narrowed considerably. Seen in the light of the war in Ukraine, transit corridors passing through Georgia emerge as preferable routes that simultaneously reduce dependence on Russia, contribute to its broader isolation and offer a realistic alternative for replacing disrupted northern transport linkages. However, such territorial and diplomatic configurations should not be understood as static or permanently fixed. Rather, they remain contingent on broader strategic dynamics, evolving security calculations, strategic anxieties and changing regional power balances and this creates a twofold blind spot for the EU. Firstly, the EU should not pick favorites yet. For instance, adopting a geopolinomic perspective, scholars such as Aftab Kazi [19] argue that the region is still undergoing a structural reconfiguration following the collapse of the USSR, with Central Asian and Caucasus states and other landlocked state like Afghanistan remaining in a prolonged transition toward their full political and economic potential. From this standpoint, there are strong “geopolinomic reasons to suggest that the development of alternative transportation routes through Central Asia, particularly those linking the region to its historic land and maritime outlets in Southwest Asia via the Arabian Sea” [19], could stimulate regional and intercontinental trade, while positively influencing ongoing economic and political transitions and contributing to broader regional stability. In this evolving landscape, additional actors could emerge as significant logistical and transit stakeholders, potentially reshaping regional connectivity patterns and altering the strategic balance of influence. Secondly, EU should not ignore Russian developments regarding the Middle Corridor. The years 2025 and the beginning of 2026 have been marked by a perceptible shift in the Russian Federation’s posture toward South Ossetian and Abkhazia [96]. Since the war in Ukraine, Russia has increasingly pursued alternative transport routes to mitigate the effects of sanctions, making the growth of railway shipments and port infrastructure in occupied Abkhazia particularly significant. Cargo turnover through Ochamchire port toward Türkiye and other destinations has reportedly increased, while some scholars argue that restoring the Abkhaz railway corridor would serve primarily political rather than economic objectives [97]. The construction of a terminal in Gali near the Enguri bridge is especially noteworthy, as existing cargo volumes and local market demand appear insufficient to justify such an investment, pointing instead to strategic motivations [97]. Recent discussions in South Ossetia, launched during the First International Economic Forum in Tskhinvali, have included proposals for constructing the Alagir–Tskhinvali railway linking North and South Ossetia, with potential access to the Georgian branch toward Gori. However, any reopening of such transit remains politically contingent on Georgia [96].

These dynamics in the Georgian occupied territories are not directly linked to Georgia’s interests, particularly since any expansion of transport infrastructure in occupied territories would generate further Russian influence and serious sovereignty and territorial integrity concerns for Tbilisi. Rather, it illustrates the extent to which connectivity landscapes in the South Caucasus remain highly fluid and subject to rapid geopolitical recalibration. In this context, the European Union should recognize this moment as an opportunity to strengthen the relevance of alternative routes to the Northern Corridor and to position itself as a credible



stakeholder in regional connectivity, rather than pursuing approaches that risk marginalizing individual partners.

Another EU blind spot identified is the relevance of the Middle Corridor and Georgia and Georgian ports in the reconstruction of Ukraine. For the reconstruction of Ukraine, Anaklia port is particularly crucial [98], and the EU should aim to become a stakeholder both in its construction (if still possible) and in advocating for security guarantees for the transport of essential materials. As the war in Ukraine has severely damaged its Black Sea ports, the urgency comes also from the fact that Batumi and Poti are already near capacity. Ignoring Anaklia's strategic value because of Russian threats would not only slow Ukraine's reconstruction but also play directly into Moscow's regional leverage. By enabling sustained access for large-tonnage commercial and potentially NATO-compatible auxiliary vessels, Anaklia would reduce Russia's current Black Sea dominance, which relies on control of a limited number of deep-water ports (notably Novorossiysk and Sevastopol), chokepoint leverage, and port-based logistics, by diversifying regional maritime infrastructure, complicating Russian sea-control, and weakening its ability to use port access and blockade threats as strategic tools [99].

The final blind spot addressed by the analysis is the EU's failure to recognize the gap between its limited role in major regional initiatives, such as the peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the negotiations regarding the war in Ukraine, and the proposed TRIPP project, and the conditions it seeks to impose on certain states. This lack of self-awareness contributes to strategic missteps. While Charles Michel, as President of the European Council, played a prominent role as mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan and helped launch the "Brussels process" aimed at securing a lasting peace agreement [100], the final deal was ultimately brokered by the United States rather than the EU. Similarly, the TRIPP initiative is also led by the U.S. and although the EU could engage more actively, current EU-U.S. relations are far from optimal. At the same time, the EU's slow involvement in the Middle Corridor and its transit countries risks sidelining it strategically. This stance is increasingly disconnected from the interests of several Member States such as Germany, France, Bulgaria, and Romania which are showing growing engagement and attention to developments in the region [101]. If the EU does not act decisively at the Union level, it may inadvertently encourage greater fragmentation, as individual Member States pursue bilateral initiatives that reflect their own national priorities rather than a coordinated EU strategy.

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

This article makes several analytical contributions to the study of inter-connectivity, EU external action, and regional dynamics in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. First, it provides a timely intervention at a critical juncture in the reconfiguration of Eurasian connectivity, capturing key shifts triggered by the war against Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East, the disruption of traditional transit routes, and the increasing strategic relevance of the Middle Corridor and related initiatives such as TRIPP.

Second, the article advances the literature by introducing and operationalizing a geopolinomic perspective as an emerging analytical framework. By placing economical, geographical, imaginary, political and discursive dimensions on an equal footing, it moves beyond the limitations of conventional geopolitical and geoeconomic approaches, which tend to treat these dimensions separately. The use of geopolinomic codes further contributes methodologically by providing a structured, state-level tool to analyse how countries are positioned within, and actively shape, connectivity systems. The article further operationalises these insights through the application of geopolinomic codes to Armenia and Georgia, which allows to identify how EU blind spots manifest across different national contexts. This approach



demonstrates that the Union's limitations are not uniform but vary depending on the distinct geopolinomic positioning of each country, thereby reinforcing the need for more differentiated and context-sensitive strategies.

Third, the article contributes to EU studies by identifying and explaining a set of strategic blind spots that emerge not only from policy design and institutional fragmentation, but also from deeper perceptual and narrative biases. By linking these blind spots to the misalignment between EU instruments, such as the Global Gateway, and the underlying geopolinomic realities of the region, the article offers a more nuanced explanation of why EU engagement often falls short of its ambitions. In doing so, it shifts the analytical focus from a simple gap between ambition and implementation to a more structural mismatch between how the EU interprets the region and how power is actually organized within it.

A very consequential strategic blind spot concerns the EU's refusal to distinguish between strategic connectivity investments, diplomatic relations and normative and even accession-related conditionality. By disengaging politically while remaining linked geographically to Georgia as a transit space the EU weakens its position in the region.

The subsequent blind spot lies in the EU's implicit assumption that countries like Georgia can develop as a free democracy under conditions of sustained Russian military threat and territorial occupation. It is a mistake to assess Georgia solely through the provisions of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, regarding the adherence to EU values before the country has real security guarantees. Moreover, it reflects a double standard to expect candidate countries to fully align with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Security and Defence Policy, when not all EU member states themselves are consistently aligned on these policies.

The third, and perhaps most consequential blind spot, is the belief that deepening engagement with Armenia can substitute for strategic attention to Georgia, a framing explicitly rejected by Armenia's own Prime Minister, and one that misreads regional interdependencies and Armenia's structural limitations as a connectivity actor. The geopolinomic analysis demonstrates that Georgia and Armenia occupy distinct and non-interchangeable positions within the broader connectivity architecture. Georgia functions as a transit-oriented corridor state, embedded in infrastructure networks linking the Black Sea to the Caspian region, whereas Armenia remains structurally constrained by its landlocked geography, unresolved conflicts, and limited integration into major transit routes. Crucially, geopolinomics places economic, spatial, and discursive dimensions on an equal analytical footing. From this perspective, the way each country is framed, whether as a "bridge," a "corridor," or, conversely, as a "peripheral" or "enclosed" space, shapes not only external investment decisions but also the range of policy options considered viable by external actors such as the European Union. By overlooking these narrative constructions, EU engagement risks relying on simplified or aspirational framings that do not correspond to material realities on the ground. Rather than attempting to substitute one country for the other, the European Union should pursue a dual-track approach that actively includes and supports both Georgia and Armenia within its connectivity and regional integration agenda. This requires recognising not only their strategic relevance as links between Europe and Asia, but also the distinct political, security, and infrastructural constraints that shape their respective roles. While Georgia remains indispensable to the functioning and viability of the EU's Middle Corridor, Armenia should be engaged through a differentiated strategy that strengthens its connectivity where feasible, supports its gradual integration into regional networks, and enhances its economic resilience despite structural limitations. At the same time, such an approach must take into account the country's imaginaries on which the narrative frameworks are based on. The EU tends to engage



with partner countries primarily through a lens focused on transitions toward democratic consolidation or market integration, yet this perspective is limited and creates blind spots.

Another important aspect revealed by the geopolinomic perspective is that territorial nexus zones, such as corridors, are not inherently beneficial simply by virtue of their geographic location; they generate value only when they align with a state's dominant geopolinomic codes. Forcing a corridor logic onto Armenia risks not only inefficient investments and misaligned policy expectations, but also further destabilising the country by exposing it to geopolitical pressures it is structurally ill-equipped to absorb. Also, neglecting to engage both Armenia and Georgia effectively would cause the EU to miss this strategic momentum and risk weakening its influence in the South Caucasus, potentially enabling other powers, such as Russia or China, to control key transport corridors and steer regional trade flows to their advantage. Moreover, framing EU narratives regarding engagement in a way that encourages competition between two small countries, like Armenia and Georgia, in a highly volatile and complicated region, rather than fostering cooperation, represents a flawed foreign policy approach and is indicative of strategic immaturity.

Another blind spot emerges in connection to EU's efforts regarding the war in Ukraine. As efforts to constrain the Northern Corridor and weaken Russia continue, the Middle Corridor emerges as a highly valuable route, bypassing Russian territory and offering a realistic alternative for disrupted transit of goods. As the geopolinomic perspective on the dissolution of the Soviet Union suggests, the region remains in a state of ongoing transformation, with political, economic, and infrastructural arrangements still evolving. Although the Middle Corridor currently functions as an alternative that reduces reliance on Russia, this should not be interpreted as a fixed or irreversible development, as regional dynamics remain subject to change. Russia is aware of the Middle Corridor's potential to undermine its regional leverage, which helps explain its shifting posture toward the Tskhinvali Region (South Ossetia) and Abkhazia. The EU should recognize this moment as an opportunity to strengthen alternative routes that bypass and isolate Russia, rather than pursuing strategies that risk marginalizing key partners or relying on unstable corridors. Moreover EU should not ignore the fact that Anaklia port and Georgian transit routes are important for Ukraine's reconstruction, offering the EU a chance to reduce Russian Black Sea dominance and secure critical logistics for large-scale commercial and potentially NATO-compatible vessels.

Finally, the EU risks failing to recognize the gap between the conditions it imposes on regional partners and its own limited role in the major diplomatic and connectivity processes shaping the region, from the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks to the TRIPP initiative, both of which have been led by the United States. Taken together, these blind spots reveal not a failure of ambition, but a persistent misalignment between the EU's strategic objectives, its perceptual frameworks, and the complex geopolinomic realities of the South Caucasus.

As an economic powerhouse, the EU should prioritize emerging trade routes and ensure that other foreign policy objectives, such as enlargement, do not undermine its political and economic interests in the regions where these critical transit corridors are developing. To enhance its strategic position, the EU must distinguish between normative or accession-related conditionality and critical connectivity imperatives, actively engage in the development and security of essential transit routes, and adopt a more nuanced, geopolitically informed approach that balances political principles with the structural realities of the region. The EU should actively reinforce initiatives like Global Gateway, transforming them into more geopolitical instruments by enhancing impact, efficiency, and flexibility, while reducing bureaucratic obstacles, to effectively advance strategic connectivity and trade objectives.

This moment represents a critical juncture, as major powers are actively repositioning themselves in Eurasia, reshaping trade, influence, and connectivity networks. For the EU,

constant engagement and more attention to the Middle Corridor offers an opportunity to counterbalance Russia's dominance over the Northern Corridor while simultaneously expanding Europe's economic reach. By positioning itself at the intersection of the Middle Corridor, IMEC, and other emerging trade routes, the EU could evolve into a central hub of Eurasian connectivity, rather than relying on a selective or double-standard approach that limits its influence. A proactive strategy would not only strengthen the EU's trade resilience and geopolitical leverage but also signal its commitment to being a reliable partner in shaping secure, diversified, and efficient transport networks across the region.

Looking ahead, future research is needed to assess the potential effects of a resolution to the war against Ukraine, developments in the Middle East, and ongoing negotiations over the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework, which will shape the implementation and strategic direction of initiatives such as the Global Gateway for the next seven years.

**Author Contributions:** The author confirms being the sole contributor to this work and has approved it for publication.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Ethical review and approval were not required for this study.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analysed in this study.

**Acknowledgments:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Z. Guo, "About the Silk Roads," UNESCO. [Online]. Available: <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/about-silk-roads>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [2]. L. Gregoratti, "North Italic settlers along the 'Amber Route'", *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 133–153, 2014. [Online]. Available: [10.47743/saa-2013-19-7](https://doi.org/10.47743/saa-2013-19-7). [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [3]. UNESCO, "Incense Route - Desert Cities in the Negev." [Online]. Available: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1107/>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [4]. S. Bennett, "Trans-Saharan Trade Routes," OER Project. [Online]. Available: <https://www.oerproject.com/OER-Materials/OER-Media/HTML-Articles/Origins/Unit6/Trans-Saharan-Trade-Routes>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [5]. UNESCO, "What are the Spice Routes?" , UNESCO Silk Roads Programme. [Online]. Available: <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/what-are-spice-routes>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [6]. M. Mottola, "Economic Corridors," *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law*, Oxford Public International Law, April 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.research.unipd.it/handle/11577/3559758>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [7]. W. C. Green, "The Historic Russian Drive for a Warm Water Port: Anatomy of a Geopolitical Myth," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1993. [Online]. Available: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol46/iss2/7/>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [8]. Yu Jie, John Wallace, "What is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?" , Chatham House, [Online]. Available: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/09/what-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-bri>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [9]. IMEC, "India–MiddleEast–Europe Economic Corridor." [Online]. Available: <https://www.imec.international/>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].



- [10]. Middle Corridor, “Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.” [Online]. Available: <https://middlecorridor.com/en/>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026]
- [11]. N. Sukiasyan, “A TRIPP Toward Peace Through Armenia’s Highlands?” German Marshall Fund. [Online]. Available: <https://www.gmfus.org/news/tripp-toward-peace-through-armenias-highlands>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [12]. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton University Press, New Edition 2017.
- [13]. L.Martino, C. Paya, “Intelligence Failures: An Exploration of Key Theories”. *Revista Científica General José María Córdova*. Vol. 24. 2026. [Online]. Available: 10.21830/19006586.1485. [Accessed: 18 March 2026].
- [14]. H. Noorali, “Geopolinomic codes: Territorial and discursive practices of connectivity networks of political economy,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 190, No. 4, 2024. [Online]. Available: 10.1111/geoj.12597 [Accessed 10 January 2026].
- [15]. D. Crikemans, “Geopolitical schools of thought: A concise overview from 1890 till 2020 and beyond”, *Geopolitics in International Relations*. 2022. [Online]. Available: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004432086\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004432086_005). [Accessed: 20 March 2026].
- [16]. T. Reifer, “World- Systems Analysis and Giovanni Aarighi” in I. Ness, Z. Cope (eds), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. [Online]. Available: [doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29901-9\\_286](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29901-9_286). [Accessed: 20 March 2026].
- [17]. S. Kalyanaraman, “War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft by Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris”, *Strategic nalysis*, Vol.41 No.6, 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2017.1377897>. [Accessed 15 March 2026].
- [18]. S.Couvreur, J. Veselinovic, “An Evermore Geoeconomic European Union? Exploring Critical Perspectives for Future Research”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 64, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13741>. [Accessed: 8 March 2026].
- [19]. A. Kazi, “End of Geopolitics and the Beginnings of Geopolinomics: Unties States in Central and Southwest Asia,” presented at the conference *The Aspects of EU–Central Asia Relations*, April 2007. [Online]. Available: [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/146212/report\\_aftab\\_kazi\\_eng.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/146212/report_aftab_kazi_eng.pdf). [Accessed 10 January 2026].
- [20]. P. J. Taylor and C. Flint, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality*, Routledge, 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315164380> . [Accessed: 19 January 2026].
- [21]. World Bank, “Middle Trade and Transport Corridor: Policies and Investments to Triple Freight Volumes and Halve Travel Time by 2030”, November 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/6248f697aed4be0f770d319dcaa4ca52-0080062023/original/Middle-Trade-and-Transport-Corridor-World-Bank-FINAL.pdf>. [Accessed 20 January 2026].
- [22]. J. Bachmann, “Transit through Middle Corridor to grow 3–4 times,” *New Silk Road Discovery*, November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.newsilkroaddiscovery.com/transit-through-middle-corridor-to-grow-3-4-times/>. [Accessed: 20 January 2026].
- [23]. T. Sharashenidze and G. Cherkezishvili, “The Perspectives of the Middle Corridor in an Age of Global Confrontation and Uncertainty”, *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, Jun. 2025. [Online] Available: [https://southcaucasus.fes.de/fileadmin/Publications/2025/Middle\\_Corridor\\_ENG\\_2025.pdf](https://southcaucasus.fes.de/fileadmin/Publications/2025/Middle_Corridor_ENG_2025.pdf). [Accessed: 20 February 2026].
- [24]. European Parliament, “Report on the implementation of the common security and defence policy – annual report 2025,” A-10-2025-0265, December 2025, [Online]. Available: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2025-0265\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2025-0265_EN.html). [Accessed: 20 January 2026].
- [25]. T. Eldem, “Russia’s War on Ukraine and the Rise of the Middle Corridor as a Third Vector of Eurasian Connectivity: Connecting Europe and Asia via Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey,” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, October 2022. [Online]. Available:10.18449/2022C64. [Accessed: 20 February 2026].
- [26]. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), “The Fragile Breakthrough Between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 33, No. 32, November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2025/11/the-fragile-breakthrough-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan/>. [Accessed: 21 January 2026].
- [27]. CivilNet, “Pashinyan: New Constitution to Follow 2026 Elections”, CivilNet, November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/988290/pashinyan-new-constitution-to-follow-2026-elections/> . [Accessed: 21 January 2026].
- [28]. Caucasus Watch, “The Armenian Diaspora and Electoral Influence Ahead of 2026”, March 2026, [Online]. Available: <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/insights/the-armenian-diaspora-and-electoral-influence-ahead-of->



- 2026.html. [Accessed: 10 March 2026].
- [29]. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Azatutyun), “Pashinian Plans Constitutional Referendum After 2026 Elections,” Azatutyun, September 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33537040.html>. [Accessed: 20 February 2026].
- [30]. A. Barseghyan, “US to receive 74% share in company overseeing and developing Trump Route,” OC Media, January 2026. [Online]. Available : <https://oc-media.org/us-to-receive-74-share-in-company-overseeing-and-developing-trump-route/>. [Accessed: 15 January 2026].
- [31]. Modern.az, “Construction of the Zangezur Corridor Is 95% Complete – VIDEO,” September 2025.[Online]. Available: <https://www.modern.az/en/qarabag/533562/construction-of-the-zangezur-%20corridor-is-95-complete-video/> . [Accessed: 20 January 2026].
- [32]. H. Hayatsever, J. Spicer, “Turkey Breaks Ground on Rail Line to Azerbaijan’s Nakhchivan,” Reuters, August 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-breaks-ground-rail-line-azerbaijans-nakhchivan-2025-08-22/>. [Accessed :20 January 2026].
- [33]. Special Eurasia OSINT Team, “Georgia Strengths Its Role as a ‘Bridge’ Between Europe and Asia,” Special Eurasia, July 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2025/07/09/georgia-bridge-europe-asia/>. [Accessed: 18 January 2026].
- [34]. M. Wood, “Jason and the Golden Fleece”, BBC History, 2011. [Online]. Available: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/greeks/jason\\_01.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/greeks/jason_01.shtml). [Accessed : 23 March 2026].
- [35]. European Council, “Georgia”, [Online]. Available: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/georgia/>. [Accessed: 18 January 2026].
- [36]. A. Sikharulidze, “Why Georgia Bets Big on the Middle Corridor,” The Caspian Post, March 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://caspianpost.com/opinion/why-georgia-bets-big-on-the-middle-corridor>. [Accessed: 18 January 2026].
- [37]. A. Bruns, “Country of Georgia: Rising Trends Converge in Georgia,” Site Selection Magazine, September 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://siteselection.com/country-of-georgia-rising-trends-converge-in-georgia/>. [Accessed: 18 January 2026].
- [38]. N. Sarkhanidze, N. Bejanidze, , “Georgia as a logistics node in the international transport corridor “, Science. Business. Society., Vol. 8, Issue 2, 2023, pp. 43-46, [Online]. Available at: <https://stumejournals.com/journals/sbs/2023/2/43>. [Accessed: 18 January 2026].
- [39]. G. Menabde, “Georgia’s Anaklia Deep-Water Port Becomes Chinese Geopolitical Project,” Jamestown Foundation, June 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://jamestown.org/georgias-anaklia-deep-water-port-becomes-chinese-geopolitical-project/>. [Accessed: 18 January 2026].
- [40]. A. Yeghiazarian, “Armenia as a landlocked state: Transit opportunities,” Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol. 15, No. 4, January 2013, pp. 80-94. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ca-c.org/index.php/cac/article/view/1682/1502>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [41]. V. Socor, “Armenia Chooses Russia and Eurasia over the European Union,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, Jamestown Foundation, May 2013. [Online]. Available: <https://jamestown.org/armenia-chooses-russia-and-eurasia-over-the-european-union/>. [Accessed: 12 January 2026].
- [42]. L. Boettiger, “The Legend of Ara and Semiramis”, Tota. [Online]. Available: <https://www.tota.world/article/2485/>. [Accessed: 23 March 2026].
- [43]. O. Vartanyan, “Why Armenia Is Seeking to Normalize Relations With Türkiye,” Carnegie Politika, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/06/armenia-turkiye-rapprochement>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [44]. V. Paplkyan, “UN Tourism Unveils “Tourism Doing Business – Investing in Armenia” Guidelines”, InTech, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://intech.am/un-tourism-doing-business-investing-in-armenia/>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [45]. F. Sauvignon, S. Benaglia, “An EU global gateway ... to what?,” Centre for European Policy Studies Explainer, November 2023. [Online]. Available: [https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CEPS-Explainer-2023-14\\_EU-Global-Gateway-to-What.pdf](https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CEPS-Explainer-2023-14_EU-Global-Gateway-to-What.pdf). [Accessed: 13 March 2026].
- [46]. European Commission, “Explaining the European Union's approach to connecting Europe and Asia”, 2018, [Online]. Available: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/memo\\_18\\_5804](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/memo_18_5804). [Accessed: 10 March 2026].
- [47]. European Commission, “2017 Eastern Partnership Summit: Stronger together”, 2017, [Online]. Available: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_17\\_4845](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_17_4845). [Accessed: 10 March 2026].
- [48]. European Council, “A globally Connected Europe”, 2021, [Online]. Available: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/07/12/a-globally-connected-europe-council-approves-conclusions/>. [Accessed: 13 January 2026].
- [49]. European Commission, “Global Gateway.” [Online].



- Available: [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway_en) . [Accessed: 13 January 2026].
- [50]. European Commission, “Global Gateway Overview.” [Online]. Available: [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/global-gateway-overview\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/global-gateway-overview_en) . [Accessed: 13 January 2026].
- [51]. European Parliament, “Report on Global Gateway — past impacts and future orientation”, 2026, [Online]. Available: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/texts-submitted.html>. [Accessed: 23 March 2026].
- [52]. T. Karjalainen, “European Norms Trap? EU Connectivity Policies and the Case of the Global Gateway,” East Asia, Vol.40, No.2, pp. 1–24, March 2023. [Online]. Available: [10.1007/s12140-023-09403-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09403-x) [Accessed: 13 January 2026].
- [53]. European Commission, “Team Europe Initiatives.” [Online]. Available: [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/team-europe-initiatives\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/team-europe-initiatives_en) . [Accessed: 13 January 2026].
- [54]. European Commission, “The Mattei Plan for Africa and Global Gateway”, 2025, [Online]. Available: [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/publications-library/mattei-plan-africa-and-global-gateway\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/publications-library/mattei-plan-africa-and-global-gateway_en) . [Accessed: 16 March 2026].
- [55]. C. Teevan S. Bilan. “The Global Gateway at two: Implementing EU strategic ambitions”, ECDPM, 2023, [Online]. Available: <https://ecdpm.org/work/global-gateway-two-implementing-eu-strategic-ambitions>. [Accessed: 20 March 2026].
- [56]. O. Wientzek, S. Nicolay, “Global Gateway Summit - New impetus for pragmatic partnerships”, 2025, [Online]. Available: <https://www.kas.de/en/country-reports/detail/-/content/global-gateway-summit-new-impetus-for-pragmatic-partnerships>. [Accessed: 20 March 2026].
- [57]. T. Pelletier, G. Perez Vico, “Unpacking the Global Gateway’s financial structure: a critical look at the development logic”, [Online]. Available: [https://www.coleurope.eu/sites/default/files/uploads/page/policy\\_paper\\_vol6\\_.pdf](https://www.coleurope.eu/sites/default/files/uploads/page/policy_paper_vol6_.pdf). [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [58]. EUR-LEX, “Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe”, 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/947/oj/eng>. [Accessed: 10 December 2025].
- [59]. European Commission, “Global Gateway: EU and Central Asian countries agree on building blocks to develop the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor,” January 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/global-gateway-eu-and-central-asian-countries-agree-building-blocks-develop-trans-caspian-transport-2024-01-30\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/global-gateway-eu-and-central-asian-countries-agree-building-blocks-develop-trans-caspian-transport-2024-01-30_en) . [Accessed: 13 January 2026].
- [60]. European Commission, “EU strengthens cross-regional cooperation with Black Sea countries, the South Caucasus and Central Asia,” October 2025. [Online]. Available: [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-strengthens-cross-regional-cooperation-black-sea-countries-south-caucasus-and-central-asia-2025-10-21\\_en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-strengthens-cross-regional-cooperation-black-sea-countries-south-caucasus-and-central-asia-2025-10-21_en) . [Accessed: 13 January 2026].
- [61]. European Commission, “Advancing a Cross-Regional Connectivity Agenda with Central Asia, Türkiye and the South Caucasus,” European Commission, February 2026. [Online]. Available: [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-study-maps-investment-needs-rebuild-trade-routes-between-europe-and-central-asia-caucasus-2026-02-06\\_en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-study-maps-investment-needs-rebuild-trade-routes-between-europe-and-central-asia-caucasus-2026-02-06_en) . [Accessed: 13 January 2026].
- [62]. M. Gvadzabia, “EU Enlargement Commissioner ‘does not rule out’ review of Georgia’s candidate status and free trade deal”, OC Media, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://oc-media.org/eu-enlargement-commissioner-does-not-rule-out-review-of-georgias-candidate-status-and-free-trade-deal/>. [Accessed: 20 March 2026].
- [63]. AFET Committee, “Presentation of the 2025 Enlargement Package by Marta Kos, Commissioner for Enlargement,” European Parliament, November 2025. [Online]. Available: [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/nl/webstreaming/committee-on-foreign-affairs-ordinary-meeting-presentation-of-2025-enlargement-package-by-marta-kos\\_20251104-1300-COMMITTEE-AFET](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/nl/webstreaming/committee-on-foreign-affairs-ordinary-meeting-presentation-of-2025-enlargement-package-by-marta-kos_20251104-1300-COMMITTEE-AFET). [Accessed: 20 December 2025].
- [64]. European Commission, “Proposal for a Council Decision on the partial suspension of the application of the Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas”, December, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52024PC0594>. [Accessed: 20 December 2025].
- [65]. Georgia Today, “Kaja Kallas: Georgia was not invited to EU Ministerial on cross-regional security,” October 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://georgiatoday.ge/kaja-kallas-georgia-was-not-invited-to-eu-ministerial-on-cross-regional-security/>. [Accessed: 20 December 2025].
- [66]. Caucasus Watch, “The EU Postpones the Human Rights Dialogue with Georgia,” November



- 2025.[Online]. Available: <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/the-eu-postpones-the-human-rights-dialogue-with-georgia.html>. [Accessed: 20 December 2025].
- [67]. A. Caprile, “EU-Georgia relations: State of play”, EPRS, 2025. [Online]. Available: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_ATA\(2025\)772849](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2025)772849) [Accessed: 20 March:2026].
- [68]. F. Baccini, “EU begins suspending direct funding to Georgia’s government:’ Just the first step”, Euronews, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/07/09/eu-suspension-georgia-government-funds/>. [Accessed: 18 march 2026].
- [69]. Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, “European Commission Publishes List of Projects of Mutual Interest, Including Black Sea Submarine Cable Project,” December 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.economy.ge/?page=news&nw=2935&lang=en>. [Accessed: 20 December 2025].
- [70]. European Commission, “EU–India Agreements”, Directorate-General for Trade, 27 January 2026. [Online]. Available: [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/india\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/india_en). [Accessed: 1 February 2026].
- [71]. C. Magee, M. Everett, and U. Uras, “Iran live news: Trump says war to last 4–5 weeks; Israel under fire,” Al Jazeera, March 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2026/3/2/us-israel-attack-iran-live>. [Accessed: 2 March 2026].
- [72]. N. Bagirova, L. Papachristou, “Azerbaijan says four injured by Iranian drones, vows to retaliate,” Reuters, March, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/missiles-drones-coming-iran-fell-airport-azerbaijan-source-says-2026-03-05/>. [Accessed: 5 March 2026.]
- [73]. N. M. Hutson, *The Silk Road after Ukraine: A New Vision for Eurasian Integration*, Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2024.
- [74]. D. Smith, “The War in Georgia and Europe’s Terrible Silence,” Atlantic Council, January 2009. [Online]. Available: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-war-in-georgia-and-europes-terrible-silence/>. [Accessed: 1 February 2026].
- [75]. European Commission, “Georgia 2023 Report”, 2023. [Online]. Available: [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD\\_2023\\_697%20Georgia%20report.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_697%20Georgia%20report.pdf). [Accessed : 20 March 2026].
- [76]. Imedi News, “Georgian FM says lack of factual evidence led to Kulevi’s removal from EU sanctions package”, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://info.imedi.ge/en/politics/8941/georgian-fm-says-lack-of-factual-evidence-led-to-kulevis-removal-from-eu-sanctions-package>. [Accessed : 23 March 2026].
- [77]. European Parliament, “Delegation to the EU-Armenia, EU-Azerbaijan, EU-Georgia- Inter-Parliamentary Delegation 5<sup>th</sup> EU-Armenia PPC Meeting”, March 2026. [Online]. Available: [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/delegation-to-eu-armenia-eu-azerbaijan-and-eu-georgia-parliamentary-committees-inter-parliamentary-d\\_20260319-0900-DELEGATION-DSCA](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/delegation-to-eu-armenia-eu-azerbaijan-and-eu-georgia-parliamentary-committees-inter-parliamentary-d_20260319-0900-DELEGATION-DSCA). [Accessed: 19 March 2026].
- [78]. Nikol Pashinyan Prime Minister of Armenia, “Formal sitting – Address by Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia”, European Parliament, March 2026. [Online]. Available: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2026-03-11-ITM-006\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2026-03-11-ITM-006_EN.html). [Accessed: 11 March 2026].
- [79]. Caucasus Watch. “Armenia Rejects Zangezur Corridor Terminology, Details Stance on Regional Transport”, July 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/armenia-rejects-zangezur-corridor-terminology-details-stance-on-regional-transport.html>. [Accessed: 28 February 2026].
- [80]. K. Harutyunyan, “Syunik Road vs. Zangezur Corridor: Why the Distinction Matters”, August 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/970996/syunik-road-vs-zangezur-corridor-why-the-distinction-matters/>. [Accessed: 28 February 2026].
- [81]. K. Sharifi, “US Management of the Zangezur Corridor In The Caucasus? Iran Won't Like It,” Radio Free Europe, July 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.rferl.org/a/us-proposal-zangezur-corridor-iran-influence-caucasus/33479973.html>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [82]. P. Gawliczek, K. Iskandarov, “The Zangezur Corridor as Part of the Global Transport Route (Against the Backdrop of Power Games in the South Caucasus Region),” *Security and Defence Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 36–53, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/161993>. [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [83]. Aljazeera, “Armenia Reassures Visiting Iran Leader It Will Control Azerbaijan Corridor”, Aljazeera, August 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/19/armenia-reassures-visiting-iran-leader-it-will-control-azerbaijan-corridor>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [84]. D. Mamyán, “Armenian President: TRIPP creates win-win opportunities for all regional countries,” Armenpress, November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1235627>. [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [85]. President of Russia, “Telephone conversation with Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan”, 2026.



- [Online]. Available: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/79380>. [Accessed 24 March 2026].
- [86]. S. Petersen, "From Cracks to Fractions in the Alliance: Armenia and Russia Drift Further Apart," *Caucasus Watch*, January 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/insights/from-cracks-to-fractions-in-the-alliance-armenia-and-russia-drift-further-apart.html>. [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [87]. N. Kingsley, "Armenian Concession Starts," *Railway Gazette*, June 2008. [Online]. Available: <https://www.railwaygazette.com/news/armenian-concession-starts/33018.article> [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [88]. S. Boltuc, "Armenia and the TRIPP Corridor: Russia's Calculated Risk in the South Caucasus," *Special Eurasia*, January 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2026/01/28/armenia-tripp-corridor-russia/>. [Accessed: 8 February 2026].
- [89]. E. Muradyan, "Armenia urges Russia to fast-track rail restoration after U.S.-backed corridor move," *CivilNet*, January 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/996849/armenia-urges-russia-to-fast-track-rail-restoration-after-u-s-backed-corridor-move/>. [Accessed 8 February 2026].
- [90]. L. Harding, "Ukraine extends lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet," *The Guardian*, April 2010. [Online]. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [91]. U.S. Mission in Georgia, "Marking 16 Years Since Russia's Invasion of Georgia," August 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://ru.usembassy.gov/marking-16-years-since-russias-invasion-of-georgia/> [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [92]. S. Vakulina, "Russia increasing military presence in Armenia, Ukraine's military intelligence claims," *Euronews*, July 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.euronews.com/2025/07/08/russia-increasing-military-presence-in-armenia-ukraines-military-intelligence-claims>. [Accessed: 10 January 2026].
- [93]. F. Vincent, "Armenia takes partial control of its borders for the first time in 32 years," *Le Monde*, October 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/10/17/armenia-takes-partial-control-of-its-borders-for-the-first-time-in-32-years\\_6729628\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/10/17/armenia-takes-partial-control-of-its-borders-for-the-first-time-in-32-years_6729628_4.html). [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [94]. S. Boltuc, "Armenia in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO): A Strategic Look," *Special Eurasia*, March 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2025/03/10/armenia-csto-analysis/>. [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [95]. Foreign Intelligence Service of the Republic of Armenia, "Annual Report on External Security Risks of the Republic of Armenia," 2026. [Online]. Available: [https://armenpress.am/storage/content/2025/pdf/NewFolder/FISA\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2026\\_English.pdf](https://armenpress.am/storage/content/2025/pdf/NewFolder/FISA_Annual_Report_2026_English.pdf). [Accessed: 20 February 2026].
- [96]. K. Puren, "Russia has changed its policy on Abkhazia and South Ossetia: results and trends", *Abkhaz World*, January 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://abkhazworld.substack.com/p/russia-has-changed-its-policy-towards>. [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [97]. Georgian-Abkhaz Context, "Transit geopolitics in the Caucasus: Is a corridor through Abkhazia possible?" December 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://geabconflict.net/blog/transit-geopolitics-in-the-caucasus-is-a-corridor-through-abkhazia-possible/>. [Accessed: 8 January 2026].
- [98]. N. Gabritchidze, "Ukraine war brings Georgia's troubled deep sea port back onto the agenda," *Eurasianet*, October 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://eurasianet.org/ukraine-war-brings-georgias-troubled-deep-sea-port-back-on-to-the-agenda>. [Accessed: 2 March 2026].
- [99]. M. Popkhadze, "Anaklia's Strategic Gamble: Will Washington's New Maritime Strategy Matter?" *GEOpolitics*, June 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://politicsgeo.com/anaklias-strategic-gamble-will-washingtons-new-maritime-strategy-matter-2/>. [Accessed: 5 January 2026].
- [100]. European Council, "Press remarks by President Charles Michel following trilateral meeting with President „Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Pashinyan of Armenia," July 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/07/15/press-remarks-by-president-charles-michel-following-trilateral-meeting-with-president-aliyev-of-azerbaijan-and-prime-minister-pashinyan-of-armenia/> [Accessed: 5 January 2026].
- [101]. Euronews, "Germany and Central Asian states voice support for closer cooperation via Middle Corridor," September 2023. [Online]. Available : <https://www.euronews.com/2023/09/30/germany-and-central-asian-states-voice-support-for-closer-cooperation-via-middle-corridor> . [Accessed: 5 January