

The European Political Community Summit in Yerevan: Perspectives on Armenia's Europeanization and Strategic Balancing

Lika Khutsiberidze¹

The eighth summit of the European Political Community (EPC), under the motto “Building the Future: Unity and Stability in Europe”, was held on May 4, 2026, in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. The EPC was established in 2022 following the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine. French President Emmanuel Macron first introduced the idea on “Europe Day” in 2022, stating that Europe needed a new way of structuring itself beyond the boundaries of the European Union. Its primary objective is to provide a forum for political and strategic discussions and to unite European nations around common challenges. It is noteworthy, that the organization is not based on a legal framework, a founding treaty, or institutional and budgetary resources; its summits rely on direct dialogue rather than formal conclusions.² Prior to this year’s summit, EPC meetings had already taken place in France, Moldova, Spain, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Albania, and Denmark.

The May 4 summit was co-chaired by European Council President António Costa and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. At the meeting, more than 40 heads of state and government discussed issues necessary for democratic resilience, improving connectivity, and strengthening economic and energy security. This summit was historic for several reasons: it was the first EPC summit held in the South Caucasus, and it preceded the first-ever bilateral EU-Armenia Summit.

Furthermore, for the first time in eight years, a French state visit took place in Yerevan, alongside the annual “Yerevan Dialogue” - an international forum that brings together government officials, the private sector, NGOs, and academia to discuss the most critical global and regional challenges. As President Costa noted, the EPC was one of the initial platforms that facilitated the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process. The May 4 meeting reconfirmed that Europe is ready to work with Armenia and the region to achieve peace and stability, which must be built on durable democratic institutions and strong economic ties between neighboring countries.³ This article analyzes what the European Political

¹ Researcher at Gnomon Wise. E-mail: l.khutsiberidze@ug.edu.ge

² Sébastien Maillard (October 13, 2025). The European Political Community can be more than an ‘unidentified political object’. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/10/european-political-community-can-be-more-unidentified-political-object>

³ European Council (May 4, 2026). Meeting of the European Political Community, 4 May 2026. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2026/05/04/epc/>

Community Summit in Yerevan means for Armenia and the South Caucasus, and how it might impact Armenia's Europeanization and Yerevan's so-called "civilized divorce" from Moscow.

What statements were made at the summit regarding Armenia and the South Caucasus?

The EPC summit held in Yerevan on May 4, 2026, was attended by EU leaders alongside heads of state from Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus region, the United Kingdom, and Canada.⁴

The agenda of the Yerevan summit extended beyond the purely regional context to include broader European challenges, such as responding to hybrid threats, strengthening democratic resilience, and ensuring economic security amidst the green transition.⁵ However, this forum turned into a crucial geopolitical demonstration for the hosting country. European Council President António Costa highlighted the historic significance of the summit, stating that "it places Armenia in the heart of Europe, which is exactly where it belongs."⁶

Western leaders emphasized that the summit should serve as a catalyst for specific actions to support the country's independence, democratic resilience, and regional security. French President Emmanuel Macron particularly praised Armenia's efforts to break free from its dependence on Russian influence, noting that since the 2018 Velvet Revolution, the country has undergone an impressive transformation toward peace and European values. Alongside security issues, European leaders focused heavily on the South Caucasus as a vital hub for continental supply chains and energy independence.⁷

⁴ European Council (May 4, 2026). Meeting of the European Political Community, 4 May 2026. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2026/05/04/epc/>

⁵ The green transition refers to the transformation of the economy and society into an ecologically cleaner, sustainable system based on efficient resource use, aimed at reducing the impacts of climate change and environmental pollution. https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/technical-support-instrument-0/green-transition_en

⁶ European Council (May 4, 2026). Opening remarks by President António Costa at the Meeting of the European Political Community. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/05/04/opening-remarks-by-president-antonio-costa-at-the-meeting-of-the-european-political-community/>

⁷ Hranoush Dermoyan and Hovhannes Nazaretyan (May 4, 2026). European Political Community Summit Kicks Off in Yerevan. Evnreport. <https://evnreport.com/new-updates/european-political-community-summit-kicks-off-in-yerevan/#:~:text=Ant%C3%B3nio%20Costa%2C%20President%20of%20the,that%20the%20summit%20was%20possible&text=In%20closing%20his%20remarks%2C%20Costa,of%20Ukraine%2C%20Moldova%20and%20Armenia>

During the summit, several leaders reaffirmed their hope for establishing a comprehensive, sustainable, and lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In their view, regional stability and integrated infrastructure form the fundamental bedrock of a European future.

The EPC summit was shortly followed by the first bilateral EU-Armenia Summit, where the EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership Agreement was signed, covering the fields of transport, energy, and digital infrastructure.

In her speech, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen reaffirmed the EU's steadfast support for Armenia's democracy and sovereignty. She highlighted the importance of the first EU-Armenia Summit, which aims to elevate their "unique" partnership to a new level across four key areas. First and foremost, she focused on connectivity, promising to support the integration of landlocked Armenia into regional transport networks like the "Trans-Caspian Corridor," while also backing Prime Minister Pashinyan's "Crossroads of Peace" initiative. As a second priority, Ursula von der Leyen named the strengthening of security cooperation, which includes assistance to the Armenian Armed Forces and combating foreign hybrid threats and disinformation. The third area highlighted was the progress made toward visa liberalization, which will bring citizens closer together. Finally, the President of the European Commission outlined continuous economic support, including a EUR 270 million resilience and growth plan designed to foster local artificial intelligence and green energy sectors, while providing essential aid to displaced persons from Nagorno Karabakh.⁸

Russia's position on Armenia's pro-European statements

A few days after the summit, on May 11, Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke about a "civilized divorce" between Armenia and Russia. When asked about Yerevan's desire for closer ties with the European Union, Putin stated that it would be entirely logical to hold a referendum in Armenia so that the population could express its opinion on the matter. According to Putin, Moscow would make its own choice based on the results and would pursue a "painless, civilized, and mutually beneficial path to divorce." However, the superficial and deceptive nature of this "promise" is evidenced by Putin's own statement claiming that everything currently happening in Ukraine was precisely the result of Kyiv's attempt to join the European Union.⁹

⁸ European Commission (May 5, 2026). Opening statement by President von der Leyen at the first EU-Armenia Summit. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_26_989

⁹ Euractiv (May 10, 2026). Putin says Armenia EU membership referendum would be 'logical'. <https://www.euractiv.com/news/putin-says-armenia-eu-membership-referendum-would-be-logical/>

What seemed at first glance to be a reasonable proposal actually served a completely different purpose. It represented a classic “soft threat,” wrapped in the language of concession but sounding like a warning: if Armenia continues its pursuit of the EU, Russia will make its choice, which could entail leveraging vital energy dependencies, enforcing a trade blockade, and expelling Armenia from the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). An early indication of this leverage being deployed was Rosselkhoznadzor (Russia’s Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Supervision) banning the import of vegetables from Armenia into Russia starting May 30, 2026. For many years, Russia has used import bans as a tool against countries with which its relations are deteriorating.¹⁰

Furthermore, by drawing a parallel to Ukraine, Putin clearly implied that Armenia might pay for its Western course with military escalation and a loss of sovereignty. The referendum idea itself was a direct interference in Armenia's internal political affairs, aimed at instilling fear in society and mobilizing the pro-Russian opposition rather than encouraging any genuine democratic process.

Thus, the Kremlin is attempting to use the idea of a referendum not to manifest democratic will, but to polarize society, framing the choice as “peace with Russia or war because of the West.” This is a classic hybrid warfare technique aimed at sowing fear among the public and destabilizing pro-Western forces.

In response, Pashinyan stated that no referendum on EU membership is planned in Armenia and that he disagrees with Putin’s framing of a “divorce.” According to him, relations between states should not be compared to marriage. Pashinyan noted that Armenia has no intention of harming Russia’s interests. However, the country will continue to act in accordance with its own national interests while maintaining relations based on respect with Moscow. He added that while Armenian-Russian relations are transforming, his dialogue with Putin still takes place in a calm, respectful environment built on mutual trust.¹¹

¹⁰ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (May 28, 2026). *Russia bans vegetable imports from Armenia*. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33767612.html>

¹¹ Kanyshai Butun (Mat 11, 2026). Armenian premier says Yerevan does not plan referendum on EU or EAEU choice. Anadolu Ajansi. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/eurasia/armenian-premier-says-yerevan-does-not-plan-referendum-on-eu-or-eaeu-choice/3934136>

A few months prior, Pashinyan had noted that no country can join the European Union without adopting the bloc's standards. Therefore, Armenia's goal is to continue reforms and objectively meet EU criteria, regardless of whether the EU ultimately accepts Armenia or not.¹²

Armenian opposition's position at the summit

The EPC summit did not pass without sharp criticism from Armenian opposition. Armenian civil society groups issued a joint appeal calling on European leaders to address the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh and to support the right of return for displaced Armenians. Metakse Hakobyan, a member of the "National Assembly of Artsakh," characterized the summit as an intervention in Armenia's internal affairs wrapped in diplomatic language. One of the opposition's core arguments was that if the EPC sidelined the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, it would risk undermining the Armenian public's trust in European institutions. They accused European officials of prioritizing regional normalization over humanitarian issues and of propping up Pashinyan. This accusation was refuted by Vassilis Maragos, the EU Ambassador to Armenia, who emphasized that the European Union supports democratic institutions, not any specific political actor.

Similarly, former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan's bloc, the "Armenia Alliance", accused the government of using European support for electoral purposes rather than a genuine drive for EU integration. Samvel Karapetyan, leader of the opposition party "Strong Armenia," approached the matter from a more economic perspective, noting that deteriorating relations with Russia could cause severe damage to Armenia. According to him, the European integration process is unrealistic and "no one is waiting for them in Europe." His party currently holds 10 percent in the polls, making it the second most popular political force after the ruling party.¹³

Azerbaijan's position at the summit

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev did not physically attend the summit, participating instead virtually. At the beginning of his address, Aliyev emphasized that back in 2025 during a meeting in Tirana with European Council President Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, he had supported the idea of holding the summit in Armenia. In return, to maintain balance, he demanded

¹² Armenpress (March 11, 2026). Pashinyan says frozen EU–Georgia dialogue biggest challenge for Armenia's EU integration. <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1244424>

¹³ Philip Purifoy (May 11, 2026). Pashinyan Uses EU Summit to Garner Support Ahead of June Elections. Jamestown. <https://jamestown.org/pashinyan-uses-eu-summit-to-garner-support-ahead-of-june-elections/>

that one of the subsequent summits be held in Baku, a condition to which Armenia agreed. At the summit, Aliyev presented the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agreement as a “reality” and highlighted that Baku had unilaterally lifted all restrictions and had already transported 12,000 tons of fuel - gasoline and diesel - in Armenia.¹⁴

Yet, while Aliyev’s speech sent a peaceful signal on one hand, it included sharp criticism of European institutions on the other. Aliyev stated that between 2021 and 2026, the European Parliament had adopted 14 resolutions “full of lies and slander”. The latest of these was passed on April 30, just four days before the summit. In response to this resolution, on May 1, Azerbaijan’s Milli Majlis (Parliament) voted to sever all ties with the European Parliament and initiate the process of withdrawing from the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.¹⁵

A few days after the Armenian summit, on May 10, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev criticized the presence of the European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA) along the Armenian border (see the [article](#) on Azerbaijan's position on EUMA). According to him, the EU behaves “as if they are defending Armenia from us [Azerbaijan].” According to the president’s press service, Ilham Aliyev noted that there is “no need” to protect Armenia from Azerbaijan, emphatically adding that they have already achieved what they wanted.¹⁶

Where does Armenia stand now?

Today, Armenia stands at a critical crossroads of domestic and foreign policy. On the one hand, Nikol Pashinyan’s government is attempting to gradually bring the country closer to the European Union, deepen cooperation in security, economy, and infrastructure, and secure its place within the European political space through democratic reforms. It is within this context that the government's statements must be viewed. Namely, that Armenia will continue to fulfill EU membership criteria even if the ultimate perspective of accession remains vague.

¹⁴ Siranush Ghazanchyan (May 4, 2026). Aliyev says peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan “is a reality” in remarks to EPC Summit. Public Radio of Armenia. <https://en.armradio.am/2026/05/04/aliyev-says-peace-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan-is-a-reality-in-remarks-to-epc-summit/>

¹⁵ APA (May 4, 2026). President Ilham Aliyev addressed 8th European Political Community Summit via video link - UPDATED-2. <https://en.apa.az/official-news/president-ilham-aliyev-addressed-8th-european-political-community-summit-via-video-link-updated-2-504390>

¹⁶ Kanyshai Butun (May 10, 2026). Azerbaijani leader slams EU border observers, saying they act ‘as if they are defending Armenia from us’. Anadolu Ajansı . <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/azerbaijani-leader-slams-eu-border-observers-saying-they-act-as-if-they-are-defending-armenia-from-us-/3933207>

On the other hand, the government recognizes that integration with the EU is not determined by political will alone and carries both geopolitical and economic constraints. Armenia remains a member of the Eurasian Economic Union and retains a significant dependence on Russia for energy, trade, and security. Because of this, messages from Moscow, including Dmitry Peskov's [warning](#) that leaving the Eurasian Union would lead to higher gas prices and economic difficulties for Armenia, are perceived as instruments of Kremlin pressure.

The regional context of the South Caucasus also plays a significant role: amidst the stagnation of Georgia's European integration process and weak regional cooperation, achieving rapid, independent progress becomes much more difficult for Armenia. Compounding this is domestic political polarization and the upcoming elections, which essentially pit two contrasting visions [against](#) each other: closer integration with the West and the EU versus maintaining traditional strategic ties with Russia. As a result, Armenia's current political reality is an attempt to simultaneously maintain security and economic stability, avoid open confrontation with Russia, and gradually strengthen its European direction. However, maintaining this balance may become increasingly difficult and politically risky in the coming years.

The 2026 European Political Community Summit in Yerevan was a significant geopolitical event for both Armenia and the wider South Caucasus. Beyond being the first EPC summit held in the region, the meeting clearly demonstrated the deepening of political, economic, and security cooperation between Armenia and the European Union. European leaders openly expressed their support for Armenia's democratic reforms, regional connectivity projects, and efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian influence. The EPC summit, alongside the concurrent first bilateral EU-Armenia Summit, further highlighted Armenia's gradual process of Europeanization and its desire to emerge as a more independent actor in the region.

At the same time, the summit clearly illustrated the complex geopolitical environment in which Armenia must make its foreign policy choices. Russia responded to Armenia's pro-European course with critical rhetoric, with Vladimir Putin framing the rapprochement with the EU as a potential "civilized divorce" from Moscow. These statements reemphasized the Kremlin's attempts to hinder deeper Western integration within the post-Soviet space through political pressure, economic

leverage, and security mechanisms. Furthermore, the criticism voiced by the Armenian opposition and Azerbaijan demonstrated that regional conflicts and domestic political standoffs continue to exert a major influence on the future of the South Caucasus.

Ultimately, the Yerevan EPC summit showed that Armenia is entering a new phase of strategic balancing between Europe and Russia. Although full integration into the EU remains an uncertain and politically sensitive issue, the summit confirmed that Armenia views democratic reforms, European connectivity, and the promotion of regional peace as essential pillars of its long-term development. However, the success of this course will heavily depend on the country's ability to maintain domestic stability, withstand external pressure, and achieve a sustainable peace with its neighbors.