

**L Deterrence through  
Transformation**

*ISA Security Summit 2026*

**FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT:  
DEBUNKING MISCONCEPTIONS SURROUNDING ARMENIA AND  
AZERBAIJAN'S TENSIONS WITH RUSSIA**

**Leonardo Zanatta – PhD Candidate at Corvinus University of  
Budapest**



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## TENSIONS IN RUSSIAN-AZERBAIJANI RELATIONS

- **December 2024** – *Azerbaijan Airlines Flight 8243* was downed by Russian air defense missiles targeting Ukrainian drones; 38 fatalities.<sup>1</sup>
- **May 2025** – President Aliyev skips the Moscow *Victory Day parade*.
- **June 2025** – 1) Russia *arrests* multiple ethnic Azerbaijanis in Yekaterinburg; 2) Azerbaijan *raids* Sputnik Azerbaijan in Baku + arrests of Russian citizens; 3) Russian cultural events in Baku are canceled.<sup>2</sup>
- **July 2025** – 1) Ukrainian intelligence reports Russia is increasing its military presence at Gyumri base in *Armenia*;<sup>3</sup> 2) EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kallas travels to Baku and publicly refers to Azerbaijan as a “reliable partner.”<sup>4</sup>
- **August 2025** – 1) Azerbaijan threatens to lift the *arms embargo* on Ukraine if Russia targets SOCAR facilities;<sup>5</sup> 2) Russian Propagandist Solovyov suggests a possible Russian *military operation* against Azerbaijan.<sup>6</sup>
- **February 2026** – 1) At the Munich Security Conference, President Aliyev declared that Russia “deliberately attacked” the *Azerbaijani embassy* and its infrastructure in Ukraine even after Baku supplied Moscow with the coordinates of its diplomatic missions;<sup>7</sup> 2) Azerbaijani pro-government media claimed that *protesters in Washington* who were assaulted by Aliyev’s security detail ‘have ties to Russian intelligence services.’<sup>8</sup>



*"The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic....existed until April 1920, when the **Russian** army invaded Azerbaijan and occupied it...We established our own state, but the Bolsheviks took it from us. In April 1920, the **Russian** army invaded Azerbaijan and occupied it. In November 1920, just several months after that, the Soviet **Russian** government decided to take Zangezur — what we call Western Zangezur from Azerbaijan and give it to Armenia."*  
Ilham Aliyev, August 2025.<sup>9</sup>

# TENSIONS IN RUSSIAN-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

- **May–November 2021** and **September 2022** – *Azerbaijani incursions* into Armenian sovereign territory. Armenia invokes CSTO support; no direct military response provided.
- **December 2022** – Start of the *Lachin Corridor blockade*. Russian peacekeepers fail to guarantee free movement under their mandate.
- **September 2023** – 1) Pashinyan defines *security reliance* on Russia a "strategic mistake"; <sup>10</sup> 2) Azerbaijan conducts *military operation* in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- **November 2023** – Armenia publicly accuses Russia of *failing to deliver contracted weapons* despite advance payments.<sup>11</sup>
- **February 2024** – 1) Armenia *freezes participation in the CSTO*, citing failure to uphold security commitments; 2) ICC Rome Statute officially enters into force for Yerevan.
- **May 2024** – Pashinyan accuses two CSTO member states of *participating in preparation of the 44-day war* against Armenia.<sup>12</sup>
- **August 2024** – Controversy about a new Armenian 8th-grade history textbook that described events from the early 19th century.
- **August 2024–January 2025** – *Russian FSB border guards withdraw* from Zvartnots International Airport and the Agarak border checkpoint with Iran.
- **September 2024** – Armenian authorities accuse Russia of involvement in preparations for a coup attempt.<sup>13</sup>
- **February 2025** – Armenia's parliament approves a law to launch the *EU accession process*.
- **February 2026** – Pashinyan proposes *selling or transferring Russian-managed railway concessions* to a third party to improve regional connectivity.<sup>14</sup>



*"To question the special role of the Russian Empire, and later the USSR and Russia, in the formation of modern Armenia means going against well-known historical facts...We expect that the Armenian authorities will not allow such a textbook to be introduced in schools and that they will no longer "turn a blind eye" to such brazen attempts to distort our shared past" Russian MFA Statement, August 2024.<sup>51</sup>*



*"This is our shared victory.  
Around 250,000 Armenian  
soldiers took part in the battles  
against German fascism.  
Forcing a country to rewrite its  
history is a very powerful tool of  
hybrid warfare." Gorgen  
Arsenyan, February 2026.<sup>50</sup>*



*"Historical Armenia is also a guarantee that we will not have the ability and knowledge to live in our environment without outside help and, therefore, we will always need a sponsor, an elder friend. This is also a guarantee that we will not have a real state, real independence, because our vision of Historical Armenia will always lead us to the trap of genocide, and we will need a **savior and a sponsor** when we find ourselves in that trap, without whom we cannot survive, we cannot exist." Nikol Pashinyan, April 2024.<sup>15</sup>*



*"We know about networks of foreign agents active in Armenia." Nikol Pashinyan, May 2024.<sup>16</sup>*



*"I think Robert Kocharyan is a person having a status of a Russian spy in Armenia. He is a politician pursuing Russian interests and rendering services only in that direction." Alen Simonyan, May 2025.<sup>17</sup>*



*"The published facts and documents make it obvious that Ezras Nersisyan was recruited by the KGB during Soviet times." Nikol Pashinyan, November 2025.<sup>18</sup>*





## A STRONGER U.S. PRESENCE IN THE REGION

- **August 2025** – Washington Peace Summit; 1) Adoption of a declaration establishing the *Trump Road for International Peace and Prosperity*; 2) Initialing of a *draft* peace agreement to normalize relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- **February 2026** – Visit of U.S. Vice President J. D. Vance to Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>19</sup>
- **In Armenia:**
  - Signing of several *bilateral agreements*, including an \$11 million sale of U.S. reconnaissance drone technology.
  - Conclusion of a *nuclear cooperation agreement*.
  - Announcement of potential U.S. exports of advanced *computer chips and infrastructure investments*.
- **In Azerbaijan:**
  - Emphasis on Azerbaijan's role as a *key transit and energy hub* linking the Caspian region to Europe.
  - Signing of a new U.S.–Azerbaijan *Strategic Partnership Charter* covering energy, digital infrastructure, defense, and economic cooperation.
  - Announcement of *expanded security cooperation*, including planned provision of coastal patrol boats for Caspian Sea operations.

# A NEW EU STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH CAUCASUS?

- **July 2022** – The EU and Azerbaijan sign a *Memorandum of Understanding* to double gas exports to Europe to 20 bcm by 2027.
- **February 2023** – The *EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia* (EUMA) is formally established.
- **February 2024** – *Aliyev wins elections* amid reported irregularities; EU officials, including Charles Michel, *congratulate* him.<sup>20</sup>
- **March 2025** – The Armenian National Assembly adopts the law on launching the *accession process* of the Republic of Armenia to the European Union.
- **October 2025** – EU–Azerbaijan Transport Dialogue is held.<sup>21</sup>
- **December 2025** – 1) Armenia–EU Partnership Strategic Agenda is signed, advancing bilateral cooperation; 2) EU High Representative Kallas announced a €15 million EU support package for Armenia in December 2025 to strengthen the country's resilience, peace efforts, and to counter foreign disinformation ahead of 2026 elections.<sup>22</sup>
- **January 2026** – The EU and Azerbaijan, together with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, agreed to launch a feasibility study for the for the development of the *Nakhchivan railway project* under the Global Gateway initiative.<sup>23</sup>





*"We are imposing sanctions against Russia, but we also engage our partners to end the war between Russia and Ukraine". Kaja Kallas, December 2025.<sup>24</sup>*

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# Armenia Is Breaking Up With Russia – And Putin Can't Stop It



By Jason Corcoran  
June 9, 2025

26



• Live TV

IN FOCUS Israel-Hamas ceasefire War in Ukraine

## Russia: Is Moscow losing Azerbaijan as an ally?

Alexey Strelnikov | Juri Rescheto  
07/03/2025

Relations between Russia and Azerbaijan have cooled following contentious arrests in both countries. Russia may be about to lose even more influence in the Caucasus.



Nona Mikhelidze  
@NonaMikhelidze

...

The "great geopolitical strategist" Putin, after seeing his influence in Central Asia diminish and the loss of Armenia, now loses Azerbaijan as well. He's left with only the Georgian government, now in the hands of "Georgian Dream" thugs. We'll see how long this lasts.

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## Armenia is turning against its erstwhile guardian, Russia

The Western-leaning prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, has few good options

28



Volodymyr Zelenskyy / Володимир З...  ..

@ZelenskyyUa

I spoke with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev [@presidentaz](#) and thanked him for his support of Ukraine, our people, and our territorial integrity. I also expressed Ukraine's clear support in the situation where Russia is brutalizing Azerbaijani citizens and threatening the Republic of Azerbaijan.

### Why Is Azerbaijan Angry with Russia?

The first is that we should not be surprised at Russia's dismal treatment of its neighbors. Democratic and imperialistic Russians have both viewed the former Soviet space, Eurasia, as Russia's exclusive sphere of influence, where the Kremlin does not tolerate UN peacekeepers, outside powers, NATO membership, or EU membership. As Putin recently said, 'There's an old rule that wherever a Russian soldier sets foot, that's ours.'

The second is that Russian leaders do not view their neighbors, who, together with Russia, constituted the USSR, as fully sovereign states. The roots of the Azerbaijani-Russian crisis lie in Baku's insistence that Moscow treat it as an equal and not as a subordinate. Vasif Huseynov wrote that Azerbaijan was 'no longer willing to tolerate Russia's perceived arrogance and imperial tone.'

Following the 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020 over Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan seems to have made a decisive **move away from Russia**, seeking closer ties with the West — particularly the United States.

At a time when Vladimir Putin needs friends in his neighbourhood, he appears instead to be losing them in the South Caucasus.

# ARE MOSCOW AND BAKU REALLY AT ODDS?

- **2021-2023** – Baku ramped up its *anti-western rhetoric*, especially against France, which has been accused of being pro-Armenia.<sup>33</sup>
- **February 2022** – Aliyev and Putin sign the *Declaration on Allied Interaction*; Baku prevents rallies in front of the Russian embassy; Azerbaijan provides humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but *no weapons* or confirmed military supplies; Baku does *not join Western sanctions*.<sup>34</sup>
- *In the meantime* –
  - Russia is the 3rd largest trade partner and the leading partner in *non-oil trade*.<sup>35</sup>
  - Russian *energy companies* continue to invest in Azerbaijan.
  - Joint work on the North–South Transport Corridor (*INSTC*).
- **December 2024** – Aliyev openly praised the DoAI as a “milestone” in Russia-Azerbaijan relations, referring to the two countries as “allies.”<sup>36</sup>
- **October 2025** – Putin publicly *apologized* for the AZAL airplane crash, recognizing that the incident was caused by a Russian anti-aircraft missile and promising compensation.<sup>37</sup>
- The following day, Igor Kartavykh, the executive director of Sputnik-Azerbaijan, was *released*.<sup>38</sup>
- **February 2026** – Azerbaijan does not vote on the UN General Assembly *resolution* “Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine.”<sup>39</sup>



*"Naturally, today provides a good opportunity to revisit our agenda, which is quite extensive and positive. So once again, thank you for this information, and I am confident that the messages we are sending today to our societies will also be received positively." Ilham Aliyev, October 2025<sup>40</sup>*



**WHY DO RUSSIA AND  
AZERBAIJAN  
MATTER SO MUCH TO  
EACH OTHER?**



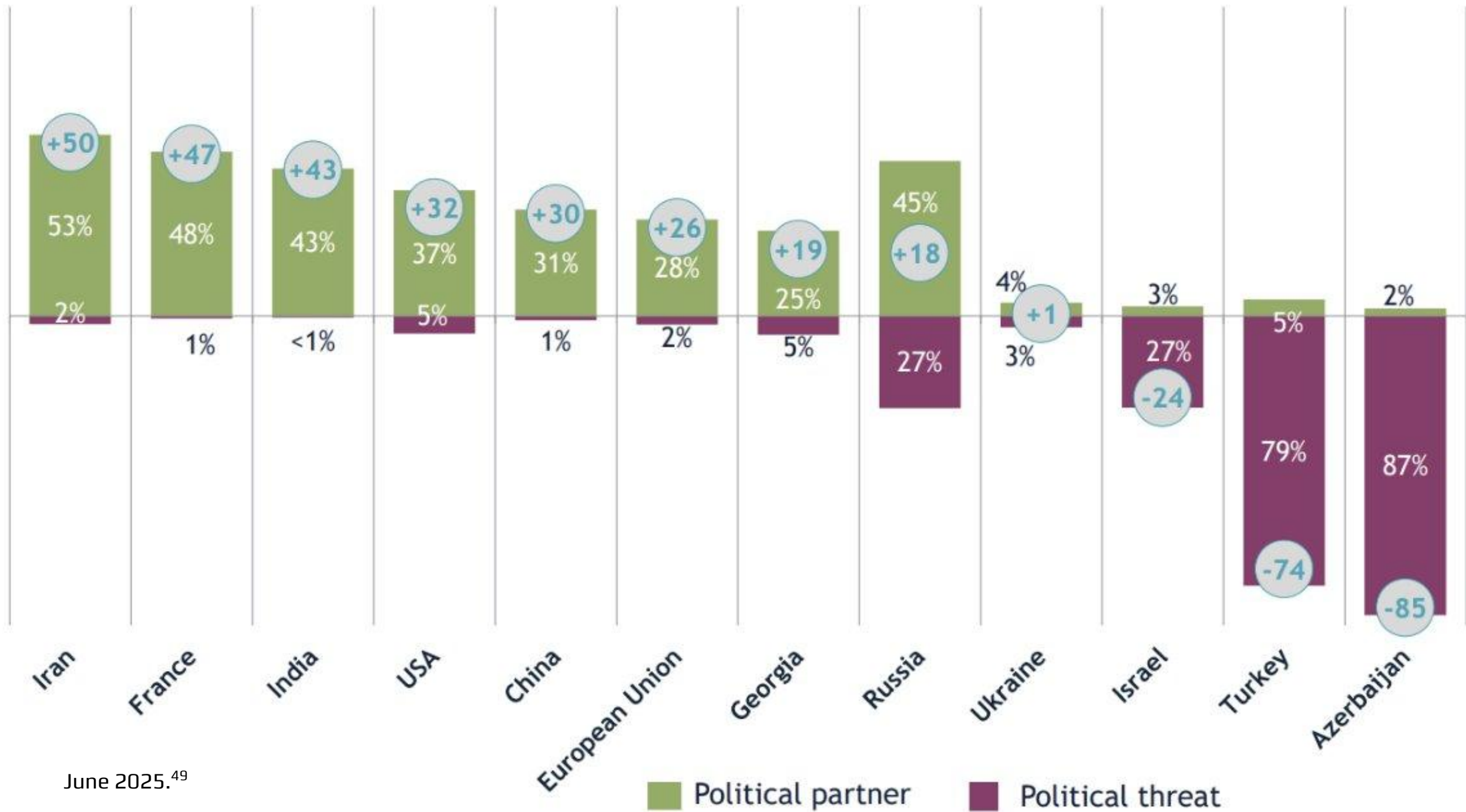


## ARE MOSCOW AND YEREVAN REALLY AT ODDS?

- **October 2024** – Vladimir Putin and Nikol Pashinyan *meet* in Moscow to address recent “misunderstandings” in bilateral relations.<sup>41</sup>
- **October 2024 and July–September 2025** – 1) Pashinyan *attends* the BRICS Summit in Kazan; announces Armenia’s application for SCO membership; participates in the International Conference on Nature and Environmental Protection in the Altai Republic; and attends the SCO summit in China.<sup>42</sup>
- **Meanwhile** Russia reconfirms its role as Armenia’s *main trading partner*, with bilateral trade reaching a record US\$12.4 billion in 2024.<sup>43</sup>
- **January and May 2025** – The foreign ministers of Armenia and Russia conduct reciprocal visits.
- **May 2025** – Pashinyan participates in Moscow’s Victory Day parade.
- **June 2025** – Valentina Matviyenko visits Yerevan.
- **September 2025** – 1) Rosatom agrees to extend the operation of the *Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant* for another decade;<sup>44</sup> 2) Speaker of the Armenian Parliament Alen Simonyan states: “Armenia is not considering the issue of *withdrawing the 102nd Russian base*. There were no such conversations.”<sup>45</sup>
- **January 2026** – Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mariya Zakharova declares, “As for the project, the *Trump Road* as they call it, we confirm our readiness to study possible options for getting involved.”<sup>46</sup>
- **February 2026** – Armenia *abstains from voting on the UN General Assembly resolution* “Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine.”<sup>47</sup>

*"We share the following idea everywhere, with all our partners, that harming Russia and Russia's interests has not been, is not, and will not be on our agenda. That is excluded. No one will be able to drag us into this, even if they try." Nikol Pashinyan, February 2026.<sup>48</sup>*



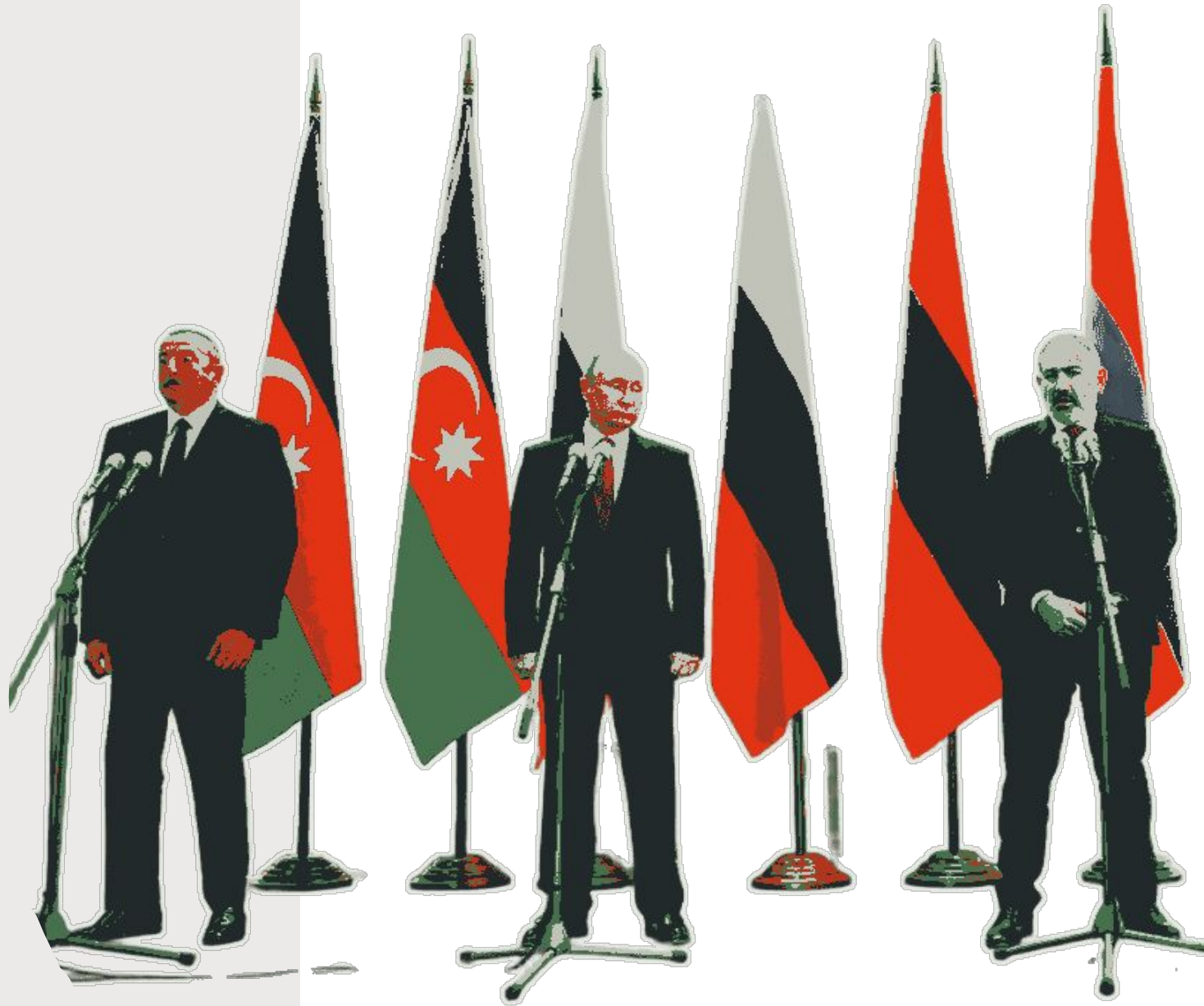




**WHY DO RUSSIA AND ARMENIA MATTER *SO MUCH* TO EACH OTHER?**

# MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- Tensions between Baku/Yerevan and Moscow go beyond simple geopolitical confrontation. They are partly *performative*, signaling discontent without implying rupture.
- With growing Western engagement and Russia's relative fragility, Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan seek *recalibration* rather than break. The aim is a more balanced relationship, not one-sided deference. *For Armenia it has also a domestic-related dimension!!*
- Despite tensions, structural constraints and overlapping interests make a *radical drift* from Moscow *unlikely*, unlike Georgia's post-2004 trajectory.
- Analysis should move *beyond event-driven readings* and embed current frictions in broader regional and systemic frameworks.
- *Wishful thinking* remains a risk. The key question is whether observers are analyzing constraints and incentives, or projecting preferred geopolitical outcomes.



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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**

