

# Building peace through connectivity: how can the European Union support the TRIPP?

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## About the author

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## Introduction

On 8 August 2025, Armenia and Azerbaijan reached a significant diplomatic milestone when US President Donald Trump hosted the leaders of both countries at the White House for the signing of a landmark joint declaration.<sup>1</sup> This trilateral agreement represents an important step toward resolving the region's most protracted conflict. At its core lies the TRIPP, a US-facilitated connectivity initiative designed to establish a 43-kilometre route through Armenian territory linking mainland Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan exclave. If fully implemented the TRIPP project could help dismantle longstanding barriers to trade and mobility between Armenia and Azerbaijan and across the South Caucasus.

Since the signing of the TRIPP agreement the region has witnessed the first tangible signs of renewed transit cooperation. In November 2025, wheat shipments from Kazakhstan and Russia reached Armenia via Azerbaijan for the first time in nearly three decades, signalling the practical reopening of regional corridors.<sup>2</sup> Azerbaijan is now preparing to deliver an initial batch of fuel to Armenia via Georgia.<sup>3</sup> These early movements – modest in scale but symbolically significant – demonstrate that the commitments linked to TRIPP are beginning to translate into operational reality. For Armenia and Azerbaijan, they represent initial confidence-building steps; for external partners they offer an early indication that the regional environment is shifting from conflict management toward cautious re-engagement.

For the EU, the implications are far from straightforward. This development presents both opportunities and strategic dilemmas. As Washington reasserts its diplomatic role and Moscow's and Tehran's influence potentially wanes, Brussels must decide how to position itself in this changing context. This policy brief explores why the TRIPP matters for the EU, how the EU can best contribute its expertise, and what tools and measures it can mobilise to support the development of the TRIPP in alignment with its own strategic and economic interests.

The brief addresses these questions by presenting five actionable policy recommendations on how the EU can support the TRIPP as a transformative instrument for peacebuilding, economic integration and long term-stability in the South Caucasus. It is important to note that any meaningful EU engagement depends on the consent of the US, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Brussels can

<sup>1</sup> BBC News, "Azerbaijan and Armenia Sign Peace Pledge at White House Summit with Trump", *BBC News*, 9 August 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c39dzl1lrgo>

<sup>2</sup> Jam News, "Transit of wheat to Armenia through Azerbaijan: what it means economically and politically", *Jam News*, 12 November 2025, <https://jam-news.net/transit-of-wheat-to-armenia-through-azerbaijan-what-it-means-economically-and-politically/>

<sup>3</sup> Akbar Novruz, "Georgia allows one-time free transit of Azerbaijani oil products to Armenia", *Azernews*, 8 December 2025, [https://www.azernews.az/oil\\_and\\_gas/251320.html](https://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/251320.html)

position itself as a supportive partner and intervene only where its involvement is explicitly welcomed by the parties.

## Why it matters for the EU's interests

From an economic perspective a stable South Caucasus underpins the security and reliability of transport and energy corridors that connect Europe with Central Asia – and more broadly with Asian markets. The region is a crucial segment of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route known as the Middle Corridor, which links the EU to China via the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. Stability in the South Caucasus enables a safe and uninterrupted flow of goods and investment, supporting initiatives such as the Global Gateway strategy.

The EU has a growing interest in energy diversification and renewable energy cooperation in the region, particularly with Azerbaijan, Georgia and potentially Armenia as demonstrated by projects such as the Black Sea Submarine Cable. Political stability and cooperative relations among these countries are essential for ensuring the smooth implementation of EU-backed infrastructure and energy projects, avoiding disruptions caused by inter-state tensions or conflict.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU has sought to capitalise on opportunities to counter Russian influence in the region. By this logic, a stable South Caucasus allows the EU to contain and gradually diminish Russia's presence in its eastern neighbourhood while expanding its own role in the region. Active involvement also reduces the risk of conflict spillover and migration pressures.

## Strategic EU-US coordination

The EU can play a proactive yet complementary role alongside the US in advancing sustainable peace and connectivity in the South Caucasus. While Brussels does not need to compete with Washington's leadership it must also avoid stagnation. Given the US's tendency to prioritise short-term results and its uncertain long-term commitment to the region, the EU's comparative advantage lies in its patience, institutional continuity and broad policy toolbox.

As Brussels seeks to define a clearer role alongside Washington, it is simultaneously exploring new diplomatic frameworks to anchor its engagement. In this context EU Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos has proposed establishing a quadrilateral transport-connectivity format with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Türkiye and the EU, emphasising that meaningful progress is possible only when peace is sustained.<sup>4</sup>

To that end the EU can integrate the TRIPP into its wider connectivity and security agenda with coordinated political endorsement at the highest level. This

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<sup>4</sup> Armenpress, "Commissioner Marta Kos proposes Armenia-Azerbaijan-Türkiye-EU connectivity format", *Armenpress*, 2 December 2025, <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1236606>

may include appointing a high-level envoy or establishing a trilateral coordination mechanism with the US and regional partners to guarantee political continuity and strategic oversight. The EU's political engagement must remain balanced and impartial throughout this process, engaging genuinely with all parties to preserve credibility and avoid the missteps of previous one-sided initiatives.

The momentum generated by the Washington agreements has triggered concern among regional powers such as Russia and Iran,<sup>5</sup> both of which are likely to seek ways to obstruct implementation and undermine progress on the TRIPP. In this environment Armenia and Azerbaijan will need sustained political support from the EU and the US to resist external pressure and remain committed to the normalisation process. A credible and visible EU role – politically, diplomatically and technically – is essential not only to safeguarding the gains achieved so far but also to ensuring that the region does not revert to instability under competing geopolitical agendas.

While some experts regard the signing of a peace agreement as an important step toward progress,<sup>6</sup> the EU should avoid pushing the parties toward a purely symbolic deal. Instead it should prioritise fostering a working peace through confidence-building measures, the gradual implementation of mutually agreed commitments and the delivery of tangible peace dividends such as improved connectivity, trade opportunities and local development benefits for both societies.

## Cartography and digital mapping

The EU can play a technical and enabling role by offering both sides targeted expertise in cartography and digital border mapping to support delimitation should such assistance be requested. The EU could provide the necessary tools and expertise if Armenia and Azerbaijan identify a need for neutral technical support.

More specifically the EU can leverage its advanced cartographic and digitalisation capabilities – including the Copernicus Earth Observation Programme,<sup>7</sup> the INSPIRE spatial data framework and GIS-based mapping technologies – to support transparent and data-driven border delimitation. These resources enable the creation of accurate digital maps, facilitate information sharing among technical experts and provide neutral and verifiable data that reduces disputes and builds confidence between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

<sup>5</sup> Parisa Hafezi and Andrew Osborn, “Iran Threatens Planned Trump Corridor Envisaged by Azerbaijan–Armenia Peace Deal”, *Reuters*, 9 August 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-threatens-planned-trump-corridor-envisaged-by-azerbaijan-armenia-peace-deal-2025-08-09/>

<sup>6</sup> Marina Ohanjanyan, “Armenia and Azerbaijan: Peace or Pause?”, *Clingendael Institute*, 25 September 2025, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/armenia-and-azerbaijan-peace-or-pause>

<sup>7</sup> Copernicus, “Europe’s Eyes on Earth”, *European Union*, 8 December 2025, <https://www.copernicus.eu/en>

Such tools should serve as technical enablers to ensure accuracy, transparency and mutual understanding of agreed border segments while fully respecting the sovereignty and decision-making authority of both sides.

## Provide feasibility support and integrate the TRIPP within the EU's connectivity agenda

The EU can play an essential role in advancing the TRIPP by providing both research expertise and targeted investment under the Global Gateway initiative.<sup>8</sup> Institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development enable the EU to support comprehensive feasibility studies, safety assessments and route-optimisation analyses across the Nakhchivan–Armenia–Azerbaijan corridor. It is important to note that the main Middle Corridor connection already runs through Azerbaijan and Georgia;<sup>9</sup> the EU's approach should frame this new route as a complementary link that broadens and reinforces Trans-Caspian connectivity.

Restoring regional transport links and reopening borders have significant potential to enhance economic cooperation and trade across the South Caucasus. Improved infrastructure and access could substantially reduce the cost and duration of trade routes, offering mutual benefits for all parties involved – particularly for Armenia.<sup>10</sup> Re-establishing overland transit would mark a decisive step toward ending Armenia's current state of regional isolation by reactivating direct trade connections to key partners such as Russia and Iran and facilitating broader access to Central Asian markets. While the Türkiye–Armenia border lies beyond the scope of the TRIPP, progress on Armenia–Azerbaijan normalisation could – over time and if Ankara and Yerevan see mutual benefit – help create a more favourable environment for discussing additional regional openings.

The TRIPP will strengthen Azerbaijan's transit and strategic position within regional and Trans-Caspian transport networks, reinforcing its role as a key connectivity hub between Europe and Asia. The project offers Europe an opportunity to diversify transport routes and reduce reliance on corridors running through Russia. For the EU, restored regional connectivity would expand secure trade corridors to Central Asia, reduce transport costs and strengthen European supply chains by diversifying trade routes.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, "Global Gateway: EU and Central Asian Countries Agree on Building Blocks to Develop the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor", *European Commission – International Partnerships*, 30 January 2024, [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)

<sup>9</sup> Middle Corridor, "Trans-Caspian International Transport Route", *Middle Corridor*, 8 December 2025, <https://middlecorridor.com/en/>

<sup>10</sup> Armen M. Ktoyan, Albert A. Hayrapetyan, Ashot S. Aleksanyan, Vahram S. Petrosyan, Vasif Huseynov, Shahmar Hajiyeve and Rusif Huseynov, "The Economic Benefits of Peace in the South Caucasus", *GCSP – Strategic Security Analysis*, Issue 31, September 2023, <https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/economic-benefits-peace-south-caucasus>

Building on this technical foundation the EU can adopt a dual approach that strengthens both the hard infrastructure – railways, highways, ports and logistics hubs – and the soft infrastructure necessary for smooth and transparent cross-border cooperation. Investment in modern rail and road links would enhance mobility and trade efficiency in the region, while technical assistance in logistics management, transport safety and infrastructure maintenance would improve reliability and performance between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

## Digitalisation and customs modernisation

Digital transformation is essential to making the TRIPP efficient and competitive. Building on its experience with the European Rail Traffic Management System,<sup>11</sup> Brussels can – if requested by Armenia and Azerbaijan – assist in the design and deployment of digital customs and transit platforms that enable seamless electronic data exchange, paperless documentation and real-time cargo tracking. By supporting the adoption of standardised customs codes, e-seals and smart logistics technologies such as radio-frequency identification<sup>12</sup> the EU would help align the TRIPP's operational systems with TRACECA and European digital standards. EU-led capacity-building programmes on Integrated Border Management could strengthen the skills of customs and border authorities, reduce delays and promote legal and procedural harmonisation along the TRIPP if Armenia and Azerbaijan request such support.

In parallel the EU can play a funding role in creating a technical coordination platform among Azerbaijan, Armenia, Türkiye and Georgia – potentially co-chaired by the EU and the US – to harmonise regulations, synchronise technical standards and facilitate data exchange. The EU could apply its experience with transnational corridor management<sup>13</sup> to help develop real-time data-sharing systems, digital dashboards and monitoring tools to track cargo flows, identify bottlenecks and coordinate infrastructure maintenance.

In the same vein the EU can provide legal advice to assist participating states in drafting and updating intergovernmental transit agreements in line with international transport conventions and European best practices to ensure a coherent and rules-based operational framework. To complement these institutional efforts the EU could also convene experts from neighbouring countries to form a joint research platform or academic consortium that delivers high-quality analyses that support governments and EU institutions in evidence-based decision-making.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission, “European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS)”, *European Commission – Transport*, 8 December 2025, [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/rail/ertms\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/rail/ertms_en)

<sup>12</sup> Frontex, “Best Practice Technical Guidelines for Automated Border Control (ABC) Systems”, *Frontex*, September 2015, [https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Research/Best\\_Practice\\_Technical\\_Guidelines\\_ABC.pdf](https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Research/Best_Practice_Technical_Guidelines_ABC.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, “Rail”, *European Commission – Transport*, 8 December 2025, [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/rail\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-modes/rail_en)



## Prioritising humanitarian demining

Landmine contamination remains one of the most serious obstacles to recovery and development, restricting access to farmland, delaying construction and disrupting trade routes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The main TRIPP corridor may not cross the most heavily mined zones but nearby areas – particularly in Azerbaijan’s territories, including parts of the Jabrayil, Fuzuli, Zangilan and Aghdam districts and sections along the border with Armenia – remain affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance. Broader demining in these zones is essential to secure transport routes, enable construction and integrate the TRIPP into the wider regional connectivity network.

The EU has already made significant contributions in this field and has become the largest international donor for mine action in Azerbaijan. In May 2024, the EU and its member states launched the Team Europe Initiative on Mine Action<sup>14</sup> aimed at increasing local capacity, improving training, raising awareness and assisting victims. Total EU support for mine action in Azerbaijan rose to about €13 million under this initiative that year,<sup>15</sup> bringing together EU institutions and member states under a single framework.

One example is D-BOX, an EU-funded project<sup>16</sup> designed to create a comprehensive “demining toolbox” for the humanitarian clearance of landmines and cluster munitions. The project ran from 2013 to 2016 and integrated satellite, drone and sensor technology to increase the safety and efficiency of demining operations. The EU could use such experience to adapt similar mapping, detection and verification technologies to support Azerbaijan’s demining efforts under the Team Europe Initiative.

To build on this progress, the EU can:

- Increase funding for mine clearance assets, including detection drones, vehicles and specialised equipment
- Support mapping and data management systems to coordinate clearance work and verification more effectively
- Provide training and certification for local demining teams to ensure sustainability and national ownership
- Create a multi-year funding framework under the Team Europe Initiative to secure stable long-term support

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<sup>14</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), “Launch of Team Europe Initiative on Mine Action in Azerbaijan”, EEAS, 3 May 2024, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/azerbaijan/launch-team-europe-initiative-mine-action-azerbaijan\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/azerbaijan/launch-team-europe-initiative-mine-action-azerbaijan_en)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> European Commission – CORDIS, *Final Report Summary: D-BOX (Demining Tool-BOX for Humanitarian Clearing of Large-Scale Areas from Anti-Personnel Landmines and Cluster Munitions)*, 30 April 2016, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/284996/reporting>

## Conclusion

The EU can approach the TRIPP with the same strategic vision that guided the development of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline.<sup>17</sup> In the 1990s, Azerbaijan lacked the financial resources to develop its energy infrastructure but strong political backing and investment from the EU, the US and international companies made the BTC project a reality through political, technical and economic support. This initiative not only safeguarded Azerbaijan's independence but also fostered regional cooperation among Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye. Today, the pipeline continues to serve as a vital route for Turkmen and Kazakh oil and makes a modest but meaningful contribution to the EU's energy diversification.

In a similar way the TRIPP now requires robust political, technical and economic support from the EU and the US. Such engagement would strengthen the EU's diversification of trade and transport routes, enhance regional interconnectivity and lay the groundwork for future strategic infrastructure and economic projects across the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea region. Realising these opportunities will not be straightforward. Political trust between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains fragile despite recent diplomatic progress; even minor setbacks could slow or derail implementation of the TRIPP. At the same time the initiative may provoke resistance from regional powers such as Russia and Iran, which view new Western-backed corridors as diminishing their influence.

Realising these outcomes requires engagement that is both strategic and sensitive to regional dynamics. The EU's potential contribution to the TRIPP should be guided by the explicit consent of the US, Armenia and Azerbaijan, ensuring that its role reinforces rather than replaces local ownership. Although TRIPP aligns strongly with the transport, economic and strategic interests of the EU, its credibility and long-term viability depend on Armenia and Azerbaijan retaining full ownership of the process, with the EU serving as a supportive and complementary partner.

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<sup>17</sup> Vasif Huseynov, "What Role for the EU in the Post-Washington South Caucasus?", *Commonspace*, 11 September 2025, <https://www.commonspace.eu/opinion/what-role-eu-post-washington-south-caucasus>

# Building Peace Together

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