

Armenia - Azerbaijan: US-brokered deal could ease tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan | Credendo

Event

On 8 August, the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan signed multiple agreements in Washington DC. If successfully implemented, these agreements could bring the two countries closer to a peace settlement, although reaching a comprehensive final agreement remains challenging.

Impact

The most notable initiative is the creation of the 'Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity' (TRIPP). This transport corridor, also known as the Zangezur corridor, will span 40 kilometres through Armenia's southernmost province of Syunik. It will be managed by an American consortium and leased to the United States for 99 years, with private US contractors overseeing operations. The route will connect mainland Azerbaijan with its exclave, Nakhchivan, providing a direct transport link to Türkiye, with which Azerbaijan maintains strong relations. This arrangement gives the United States a long-term strategic stake in the region's security.

Relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan have been strained for decades. In the late 1980s, while both were still part of the Soviet Union, Armenian-backed separatists seized Nagorno-Karabakh. Over the years, several wars were fought over the region. In 2023, Azerbaijan, buoyed by the strong growth of its oil and gas industry, seized full control of Nagorno-Karabakh.

This offensive prompted Armenia to re-evaluate its foreign policy, especially after Russia – preoccupied with the war in Ukraine – failed to intervene. Armenia's intention to withdraw from the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) illustrates the collapse of trust in Moscow. Instead, Armenia is strengthening ties with Western partners. It signed a strategic partnership agreement with the United States and formally communicated its intent to pursue EU membership in January this year.

Russia signalled its disapproval of the deal by launching attacks on the Orlovka gas compressor station in Ukraine's Odessa region – part of the Trans-Balkan pipeline that transports Azerbaijani gas – shortly after the peace deal was signed. Iran considers the corridor to be a threat, primarily due to its potential impact on trade with Armenia. Türkiye, on the other hand, has embraced the opportunity and held a groundbreaking ceremony on 22 August for a new rail line from the eastern hub of Kars to Dilucu, near Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan exclave.

Despite the progress, several obstacles remain. Armenia's opposition argues that the TRIPP compromises national sovereignty, increasing pressure on the unpopular Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Azerbaijan is demanding that Armenia amends its constitution to renounce all claims on Nagorno-Karabakh, a move that would require a divisive referendum. Another risk is that the United States may lose interest, thus undermining the long-term viability of the initiative.

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