

Azerbaijan lifts transit blockade to Armenia: a step towards lasting peace

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On 21 October, during a visit to Kazakhstan, President Ilham Aliyev announced that Azerbaijan had lifted all restrictions on the transit of goods to Armenia. He also stated that the so-called Zangezur corridor – a road and rail route running through Armenia and linking mainland Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan exclave – could be opened by the end of 2028. On this occasion, he highlighted the role of President Donald Trump in the normalisation of Azerbaijani–Armenian relations, particularly in reaching agreements concerning the corridor, which is to be managed by a US company.

Baku's decision marks the end of the economic blockade of Armenia imposed by Azerbaijan in September 1989 in connection with the outbreak of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This move carries significant symbolic weight and brings both countries closer to a lasting peace. However, its full economic potential can only be realised once borders are opened and diplomatic relations are established. The Azerbaijani–Armenian border, which remains undelimited, is still closed, as there are no crossings or appropriate border infrastructure in place.

Commentary

- **Baku's decision carries considerable political weight, but its economic impact on bilateral relations will remain limited in the coming months.** With the borders still closed and lacking infrastructure (such as border crossings and access roads), goods destined for Armenia will be transported from Azerbaijan by rail via Georgia. It is already known that the first shipment to be delivered in this manner will be grain from Kazakhstan, a fact confirmed by the Armenian side. The opening of this route also enhances Armenia's import capacity, enabling it to diversify its suppliers. This is particularly important as relations between Yerevan and Moscow continue to deteriorate. Russia has tightened its migration regulations, prompting protests from Armenian lorry drivers, who have been forced to reduce the number of trips they make to this country.
- **Following Azerbaijan's lifting of restrictions, Turkey may decide to take a similar step.** Ankara joined the blockade of Armenia in July 1992. Both countries have expressed their willingness to normalise relations and have taken steps in that direction, as evidenced by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's visit to Turkey in June this year (see '[Pashinyan's historic visit to Turkey – a growing urgency for normalisation](#)'). Turkey, which has

supported Azerbaijan since the early days of its independence, continues to maintain that a formal peace agreement with Armenia is contingent upon an Armenian–Azerbaijani settlement. It is possible that Ankara is exerting behind-the-scenes pressure on Baku to bring this about as soon as possible. President Aliyev’s decision has created a window of opportunity for Turkey. In this case, reopening the border cannot be ruled out, as the necessary infrastructure is already in place. Moves to reduce Armenia’s regional isolation improve the electoral prospects of Pashinyan, who has championed the normalisation of relations with its Turkic neighbours, ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2026.

- **The transit route through Armenia is set to become part of the so-called Middle Corridor, which links China with Europe via Central Asia and the South Caucasus, increasing the route’s overall appeal.** Speaking in Astana, President Aliyev estimated the capacity of the Zangezur corridor at 15 million tonnes annually. Opening this route will also expand Turkey’s regional influence, as it will gain a land connection to Azerbaijan and, through it, to Central Asia. Placing the route under the management of a US company serves the interests of both Baku and Yerevan. Azerbaijan has insisted that the connection to Nakhchivan should, in practice, function as an extraterritorial route. Meanwhile, Armenia has stressed the importance of preserving its territorial integrity. Naming the project TRIPP (the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity) is intended to provide a political umbrella from Washington – a move supported by Ankara. As the project progresses, Yerevan is expected to seek a reduction – and eventually the removal – of Russian border troops stationed along its frontiers with Iran and Turkey. These forces were withdrawn from Zvartnots International Airport in the capital at the end of July 2024.
- **Current relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan can be described as a ‘peace without peace’.** Baku has made the signing of a formal agreement conditional upon an amendment to the Armenian constitution, whose preamble references the Declaration of Independence mentioning Nagorno-Karabakh. Yerevan has accepted this condition, but changing the constitution requires a referendum – a process that necessitates relevant preparations. Nevertheless, on 8 August this year, an agreement was initialled in Washington by the two countries’ foreign ministers, after which the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the United States signed a peace declaration. No armed incidents have occurred for several months. Further steps towards normalisation can be expected, including progress in the process of border delimitation and demarcation.