The China Factor in Armenia's Foreign Policy And Future Perspectives

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Since 2020, Armenia’s foreign policy has leaned predominantly toward the West. Extensive discussions aimed at expanding cooperation with Western European nations and facilitating Armenia’s integration with the West have further accelerated this orientation. Concurrently, a noticeable shift toward the East has also emerged in Armenia’s recent foreign policy. Within the context of China’s efforts to broaden its global engagement, particular importance is being placed on developing relations with Armenia. In a statement regarding Armenia-China ties, Chen Ming, Chargé d’Affaires at the Chinese Embassy in Armenia, noted that these relations are developing actively and expressed a readiness to continue efforts in this direction [1]. China’s foreign policy is primarily based on steps taken to develop relations with countries in various regions, in line with its own interests. Central Asia serves as a clear example of this. Similarly, in the South Caucasus, China’s relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia have already reached the level of a strategic partnership. In this context, developing cooperation with Armenia is important for China. At the same time, from the perspective of Armenia’s national interests, cooperation with China creates the necessary conditions for the emergence of new trends in the country’s development.

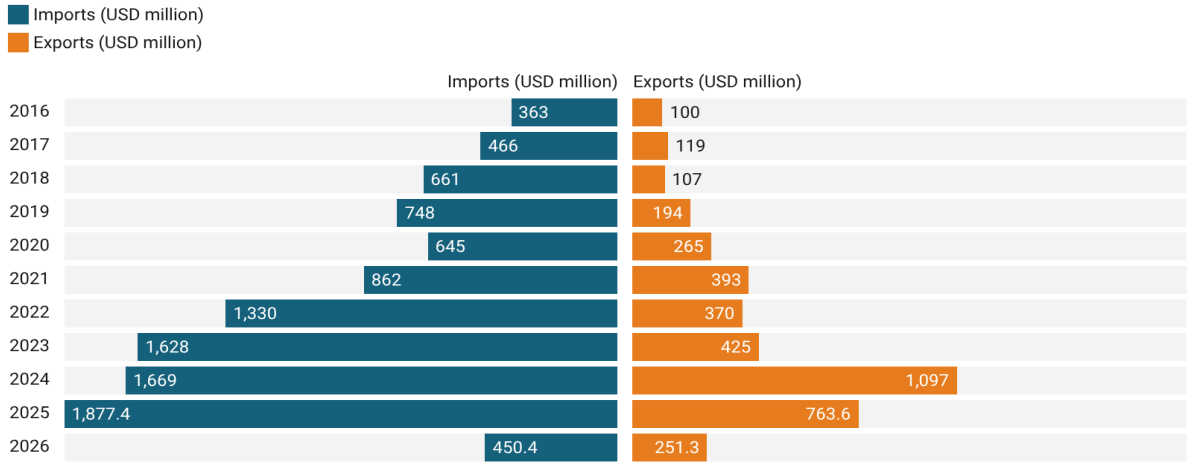
Bilateral relations gained positive momentum when Armenia joined the "Belt and Road" initiative in 2015 [2]. However, due to Armenia's close ties with Russia at the time, the anticipated development in relations with both the West and the East did not fully materialize. More recently, as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war and the imposition of economic sanctions on Russia, the "Chinese factor" has begun to play a more significant role in Armenia's economy. Bilateral trade turnover between Armenia and China has increased, driven primarily by a rise in imports from China. This growth can be attributed to an increase in re-exports from Armenia to Russia between 2022 and 2024. Consequently, China has become Armenia's second-largest trading partner.

Annual Imports and Exports (2016-2026)

Steps are being taken toward the development of bilateral relations, and cooperation mechanisms covering various fields are being established. The scope of these relations is expanding further against the backdrop of significant global events. The diagram below presents data regarding Armenia’s exports to and imports from China over the years. Based on this chart, one can assess the development of trade between Armenia and China. The diagram

shows that trade between the two countries has continued to grow over the last decade, driven by an increase in both imports and exports. While Armenia's imports from China saw only a marginal rise between 2018 and 2021, they have surged rapidly since 2022. Meanwhile, although there was no significant growth in the rate of exports to China between 2018 and 2023, the figures for 2024–2025 have been marked by a notable upward trend. The figure of $251.3 million recorded for the first quarter of 2026 suggests that exports to China will continue to increase by the end of the year.

Figure 1. Annual imports and exports between Armenia and China, in USD million



The figures for 2026 cover only the period from January to March, not the entire year. The figures for each year have been rounded. Additional source: Armenian Center for Socio-Economic Studies - ACSES, https://www.acses.am/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Chinas-influence_final-report-1.pdf

Source: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of the Republic of Armenia, https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/cn

These indicators not only show an increase in the volume of trade between the two countries over the last 10 years, but also point to the existence of positive dynamics in their mutual relations. Import and export figures between the two countries remain high. In 2024, Armenia's imports from China were substantial high, and the value of its exports to China also reached a very high level. Armenia's exports to China consisted primarily of gold, copper ores and concentrates, silver, and other mineral raw materials; meanwhile, its imports from China were dominated by computers and computing equipment, telephones and communication devices, automobiles, semiconductors, and industrial machinery. In 2024, Armenia's total exports of copper ores and concentrates amounted to 558.28 million US dollars [3]. The value of copper ores and concentrates exported to China amounted to $573.86 million for 2025 [4]. This represents an increase of $139.25 million over the figure of $434.61 million recorded in 2024.

In 2024, 6,716 kg of unprocessed gold, valued at $451.05 million, was exported to China. However, this figure decreased by 98% in 2025, amounting to $9.22 million, or 86 kg [5];[6].

Development Bilateral Dynamics

China-Armenia relations are developing primarily in the economic and political spheres. In the realm of security, however, the implementation of comprehensive measures between China and Armenia remains limited. Armenia's relations with China have been growing in recent years; a clear example of this is the numerous meetings held between state officials and the heads of various government institutions. During his first official visit to China on June 26, 2025, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan met with his counterpart, Wang Yi. Wang Yi noted that, regardless of changes in the international and regional landscape, the two countries have consistently maintained a relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and mutually beneficial cooperation [7]. Mirzoyan reaffirmed Armenia's commitment to the "One China" principle and its support for safeguarding China's core interests.

On 31 August 2025, a Declaration on the creation of strategic partnership between Armenia and China was signed [8]. The act essentially includes the continuation of broad cooperation in areas such as political and security, the attraction of trade and investments to Armenia, numericalization, transportation and regional connections. is. After the signing of this act, official negotiations could be continued continuously until 2026. The most important event was the signing of the international automobile transport agreement between the governments of Armenia and China on the 22nd of January 2026 [9]. The agreement will organize reliable and highly productive international automobile transport between the two countries. On the other hand, it will serve to increase the trade flow between Armenia and China by expanding the framework of Armenia's logistics policy.

The large-scale and result-oriented steps taken in bilateral relations in recent years indicate that ties between China and Armenia will continue to develop further. The current state of relations creates conditions for both countries to continue cooperating within the framework of shared interests on various issues. In particular, measures taken regarding the development of transport corridors will have a significant impact on bilateral relations. The continued development of relations between the two countries could lead to a transition from a partnership to an alliance.

However, for this, the parties must first deepen cooperation in health, science and technology, politics, economy and other fields. One of China's main goals is to find a reliable partner in the South Caucasus. The dynamics of the development of relations with Azerbaijan in the South

Caucasus already provide sufficient reason to say that China has found a reliable partner. In this regard, although Armenia remains somewhat in the shadows, the steps it will take can further increase the country's sphere of influence. In order to expand its relations with China, Armenia should first of all try to achieve a dynamic and sustainable development in its relations with Azerbaijan. The main reason for this is that China has close economic relations with Azerbaijan and needs Azerbaijan in many projects. On the other hand, the normalization of Armenia's relations with Azerbaijan will create conditions for the opening of the "TRIPP (Zangezur) Corridor". The steps Armenia will take in this direction will not only be decisive, but will also have a positive effect on the development of relations with China. On the other hand, it will create new opportunities for creating a security environment in the region.

Another significant aspect of the relationship between Armenia and China involves the consistent implementation of cooperation in the field of education. The steps to be taken in the coming years to expand educational collaboration will create favorable conditions for Armenian citizens to pursue their studies in China. These initiatives will also contribute to the promotion of tourism between the two nations. The first direct flights between the two countries were launched in 2023. Since September 2024, China Southern Airlines has been operating biweekly flights connecting Yerevan with the city of Urumqi in western China. In 2024, 32,826 Chinese citizens visited Armenia for tourism purposes [10]. This figure represents a 65% increase compared to the approximately 19,893 Chinese citizens who visited in 2023. The economic review for 2025 by the Ministry of Economy of Armenia indicates that the number of Chinese tourists has increased by 12,178 compared to 2024. This represents an increase of approximately 37.1% relative to the previous year [11].

Conclusion

As a result, it can be seen that although Armenia expanded its relations with the West, it also showed interest in the East. It is predictable that relations with China will deepen in the coming years. In this context, it is possible to increase economic cooperation, China will take a greater role in infrastructure projects and sign new agreements within the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative. In addition, Armenia is expected to increase its diplomatic, cultural and educational contacts with China within the framework of its multifaceted foreign policy. Furthermore, diplomatic initiatives surrounding the TRIPP (Zangezur) Corridor and the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace process will positively influence the trajectory of relations with China, thereby further increasing China's interest in the region. Armenia’s ability to capitalize on this interest could be defined as a key strategic objective for the country's development. At the same time, it is

reasonable to anticipate that trade relations with China will continue to expand as long as the Russia-Ukraine war persists.

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