

GPC POLICY BRIEF

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THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL COMMUNITY: NAVIGATING THE PATH TO CONSOLIDATION

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The European Political Community (EPC) was established as a platform to seek common responses to new challenges in times of war and to think ahead collectively in Europe. After three summits in Prague, Chisinau, and Granada, the initiative will bring together European leaders for the fourth or fifth times in the United Kingdom and Hungary this year. This will add up to five summits in two years. Even if there are many open questions regarding its institutionalization, budget, and impact, it is the right time to discuss the elements that would contribute to the consolidation of the EPC. To do so, insights gained from previous summits should be analyzed, opening up the way to the geopolitical significance of the upcoming Blenheim Summit, near Oxford. This paper argues that discussions regarding the security of Europe must remain central to the EPC's agenda, while suggesting that tackling issues like migration and enlargement at a continental level (on top of what is first achieved at the European Union level) is likely to foster stronger strategic bonds among European leaders.

INTRODUCTION

The resurgence of war on European soil has reignited efforts to establish new platforms capable of addressing the current stark reality. In direct response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the European Political Community (EPC) has emerged as a pan-European initiative. Its inception in Prague on October 6, 2022 was the beginning of a concerted effort towards fostering dialogue and coordination to tackle foreign and security policy challenges at a continental level. The deliberate exclusion of Belarus and Russia continues to underscore their isolation and articulates a resolute message of European solidarity in opposition to Russia's aggressive military actions.

So far, the EPC [achieved its goal of becoming an umbrella](#) for the key players on the continent, including major military powers such as the United Kingdom and Turkey and major energy suppliers such as Azerbaijan and Norway. Despite diverse priorities, the EPC's emphasis on equal footing and informality has proven useful to different groups of countries. In addition to its inaugural summit in the Czech Republic, the EPC has also held summits in Chisinau, Moldova and Granada, Spain and two more are scheduled for 2024: in Woodstock, the United Kingdom on July 18 and in Hungary on November 7. It is thus an appropriate moment to discuss the basic principles of consolidation for this continent-wide initiative.

THE LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL COMMUNITY

The original goal of the EPC, first suggested by French President Emmanuel Macron, was to seek common responses to new challenges in times of war and to think ahead collectively. Moreover, the EPC was designed to provide a political space for regular

consultations between the EU and non-EU countries in wider Europe to discuss collective security and stability, at the leaders' level. The strategic dialogues included topics such as connectivity, energy, climate action, and the overall challenges facing European economies.

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The first EPC summit in [Prague was widely considered a success](#). The event gathered 44 European heads of state and government at Prague Castle, including representatives from all EU member states, the EFTA countries (Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Iceland), the Eastern Trio (Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova), six countries in the Western Balkans (Albania, Northern Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro), Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. This achievement had immense symbolic value, demonstrating the European continent's united stance against the invasion of Ukraine. The summit also achieved several diplomatic commitments¹, showcasing European leaders' willingness to engage in a strategic dialogue at the continental level despite diverse policy positions and threat perceptions. The EPC's flexible format, in contrast with other EU institutions, was essential to success. A new continental platform was born.

[The second EPC summit raised the bar a notch higher](#). Organised in Chisinau in June 2023, only kilometres away from war-torn Ukraine, the summit sent, again, a clear message of European solidarity with Ukraine, and an underlying message of support and commitment to Moldova, a former Soviet Republic and one of the



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countries most vulnerable to Russia. This summit focused on a comprehensive conversation about security, as well as the enlargement debate. In this context, Moldova's President Maia Sandu and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reiterated their countries' EU aspiration.

Meanwhile, discussions about the EPC's added value, format, institutionalization, and content intensified. While the Chisinau summit provided an opportunity to advance the EPC's core task of increasing foreign and security policy dialogue on common challenges, greater achievements were expected at the next summit.

The EPC's third summit took place in October 2023 in the [Spanish city of Granada](#). Although the summit fostered discussions on shared strategic challenges in key dimensions such as digitalization, energy and climate, multilateralism, and security at the continental level between EU and non-EU members on an equal footing, the outcomes were limited².

The absence of key leaders, including Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who missed his second consecutive summit, increased the sense of frustration. Moreover, the Granada summit was overshadowed by the disagreement between Spain and the UK on including migration as an agenda topic, leading to the cancellation of the final press conference. These cancellations, disagreements, and lack of coordination between participants created an atmosphere of discontent for the [throughout Granada summit](#).

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a fifth summit in Hungary shortly after the presidential elections in the United States.

THE GEOPOLITICAL RELEVANCE OF THE BLENHEIM SUMMIT

The upcoming EPC, to be held on July 18th at Blenheim Palace – the birthplace of Winston Churchill – in Woodstock, Oxfordshire, will hold major historical symbolism as a moment of profound geopolitical change. The timing of the summit is noteworthy, as it will occur just after the UK's national elections on July 4, offering the newly elected Prime Minister a platform to immediately meet his counterparts. The EPC summit is also scheduled in the midst of the Republican Convention in the United States. Although likely coincidental, the timing underscores the urgent need for Europeans to think strategically about the continent's security, particularly when faced with a potential second Trump presidency.

In addition, this summit will follow the NATO summit commemorating the alliance's 75th anniversary from July 9 to 11 in Washington DC. There, members will discuss key challenges facing the alliance and provide strategic direction and some insights from NATO's meeting are expected to resurface during the EPC Summit, including the urgent need for European countries to further invest in the security of their continent.

Another interesting issue will be who represents the EU at the EPC summit. The EPC has witnessed growing representation from EU institutions during its constitutional year. However, since the summit takes place after the European Parliament (EP) elections, the European Commission will not yet be formed. The Blenheim Summit

will take place eventually on the very same day that the newly elected MEPs vote on the President of the Commission, to be nominated by then.

It is safe to say that the war in Ukraine will remain at the centre of the summit's agenda. With the looming prospect of a new Russian military offensive, leaders are expected to focus their discussions on how to support Ukraine's resistance and, by extension, European security and stability.

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It is unclear whether the migration issue, particularly pertinent to UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, will feature prominently on the agenda especially given the likely victory of the Labour Party in the upcoming election. Simultaneously, the approach to the securitization of the migration conversation is also advancing in the EU, particularly in the Netherlands. Should this view prevail, it would have severe consequences for the relationship between Europe and third countries outside the continent.

The UK may also take the opportunity to put forward its controversial Rwanda Bill as a model for addressing irregular migration. This would be detrimental to the EU's efforts. Having said that, irregular migration is an issue that needs a response on the continental level – beyond the EU – could lead to more inclusive dialogue.

When it comes to concrete initiatives, France has already proposed several ideas, including a rail pass to facilitate youth travel across the continent and also efforts to combat disinformation, cybersecurity threats, and democratic interference.

Finally, Erdogan is expected to join the summit this time, adding another layer of value since the EU lacks productive channels with Turkey. His presence back would signal a diplomatic success for the EPC, opening up a conversation with this strategically important NATO member.

THREE PRINCIPLES FOR THE CONSOLIDATION: CONTENT, EFFECTIVENESS, AND LINK TO ENLARGEMENT

I. Security needs to remain the at the core of the European Political Community

For the EPC to increase its added value compared to other European forums, [European security needs to remain the platform's backbone](#). In its essence, the EPC is a platform for engaging in strategic dialogue and address specific foreign policy issues at the highest political level. This is particularly valuable, as many participants lack alternative venues to engage on such an equal footing. Upholding the EPC as the primary platform for discussing European security is an end in itself, as Macron stressed in his second Sorbonne speech. The more countries that take ownership of the initiative and invest in it, as Germany is yet to do, the more coordination on continental security will become a reality.

Furthermore, EPC participating countries should also engage in areas of security beyond the military realm, which is primarily meant for NATO, and address foreign policy issues such as energy security, trade and supply chain resilience, food security, cyber threats, and climate-driven instability. The proliferation of security challenges in the current geopolitical context and Russia's hybrid war presents an opportunity for upcoming EPC summits to increase their relevance in shaping a shared European geopolitical assessment.

Additionally, the EPC must focus on identifying and consolidating elements that are relevant for all participants, including both internal and external threats and risks to the continent's security. While Russia's invasion of Ukraine is clearly the EPC's *raison d'être*, the platform now needs to find new consensus on long-term issues of common interest to European security in order to create consolidating dynamics.

A possible return of Donald Trump to the White House would be particularly challenging to European security. Faced with the prospect of [diminishing support for Ukraine](#) and the possible undermining of NATO, the EPC could help European leaders to coordinate and express their support for Ukraine and further invest in the European pillar of NATO in the long term.

EPC security conversations should merge two complementary approaches to deal with the continent's challenges. While the EPC should focus on short-term crisis mitigation (the Armenia-Azerbaijan situation, for example), it should also prioritize continuous coordination in the realm of foreign and security policy for long-term stability. For that purpose, addressing the challenge of political will is imperative, as it remains the primary obstacle to fostering consensus in security affairs.

As mentioned, the decision to include migration on the agenda of the upcoming EPC summit may seem controversial at first, given that some countries are sources of irregular migration and others are recipients. However, including this could help the EPC to foster a common culture of border protection and a common approach to the external dimension of migratory policies [common culture of border protection](#) and a common approach to the external dimension of migratory policies. EPC participating countries could set up a

migration, mobility, and asylum forum to address this. On the one hand, this space could foster a common approach to border protection through information sharing and training on border protection and human rights implementation.

On the other hand, the EU's externalization of border control, migration route monitoring, and the fight against smugglers to third countries has proven to be of limited effectiveness in reducing irregular migratory flows. The EPC could prove a useful forum to discuss innovative ways to deal with the external dimension of migratory policies by developing a common approach to engaging with non-EPC migration origin countries.

II. Making the most out of informality: fostering EPC's effectiveness

While informality and [flexibility](#) need to remain the main assets of the EPC, the Granada summit highlighted the need for a certain degree of institutionalisation for agenda-setting. Innovative thinking is required to make the most of the leaders' time while transforming the platform's goals into tangible deliverables.

The fact that the EPC meetings are dependent on the degree of preparation by the host country makes the EPC vulnerable to last-minute changes to the agenda and participant's list. The troika of host countries, as experienced for the first three summits, does not guarantee full ownership of the format by others or swift preparation.

The EPC needs to find a balanced degree of institutionalisation and prior preparation to foster effectiveness and encourage ownership in participation. For example, one way to structure the summits would be to take a cue from France's appointment of a special envoy to the EPC and strengthen the formal network of sherpas or contact persons, both in the host country and among

the rest of the participants, and in this way increase ownership of the initiative. These dedicated envoys could work on an agenda to structure the summits and ensure that countries are better coordinated in their participation. The agenda should be created collaboratively to prevent clear “no-goes” for the participating countries. Additionally, the contact points could start adding specific contents to the dialogues in a perennial way, revitalizing the summit and allowing the topics to evolve.

Furthermore, while the platform sets the groundwork for discussions at the continental level, it could also provide opportunities to create ad hoc coalitions of the willing and bring together small groups of countries to work together on specific security domains and issues. The summit in the UK plans to allow ample space for such initiatives.

In particular, conflict and bilateral dispute resolution, crisis prevention, and crisis management on the continent will prove useful to support peace in Europe as a whole. Most of these are better secured by smaller groups of countries. However, the ‘minilateral’ dimension of the platform shouldn’t overshadow the leading challenge of engaging in long-term security dialogues in a regional multilateral format with a high-level, flexible and personal approach on equal footing for all countries.

III. Defining the link to EU enlargement

Even if it had created suspicions in the very beginning, the EPC is not meant to replace the EU accession process for candidate countries. The EPC has proven to be a welcomed framework in which all European countries can participate on equal terms, leaving aside the question of EU membership and the stage of their accession process to the EU.

Nevertheless, the EPC’s link to the EU’s enlargement policy is a delicate one. Bringing enlargement to the forefront of the EPC conversation could be highly detrimental to enhancing the ownership of the initiative for European countries that are not on their path to EU membership, such as the United Kingdom.

However, the EPC could prove beneficial for further EU enlargement and vice versa if a common understanding is established. With that intention, the discussions could focus on the security dimension of future EU enlargement, which is also supported by non-EU members such as the UK. Achieving a common assessment of the continental security challenges within the EPC could encourage candidate countries to further align with the EU in terms of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

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The key to this nexus lies in discussing security issues inclusively. No EPC participating country should be excluded based on their prospect of becoming an EU member. Furthermore, the EPC could serve as a useful format to discuss the implementation of deterrence mechanisms for the entire continent or the creation of a broader European defence industry. Concrete measures and results in this field would prove the EPC’s added value both for the security of the continent and for the security dimension of enlargement moving forward.

CONCLUSIONS

The EPC now finds itself at a crossroads, needing to further consolidate its role as a platform for pan-European strategic dialogue and security cooperation while pushing for the delivery of concrete results.

Despite challenges such as varying priorities and the need to address political will, the EPC has shown its potential to foster “strategic intimacy,” as Macron put it, among European leaders.

As the EPC moves forward, it must prioritise discussions on security challenges at the continental level, especially as the war in Ukraine persists and becomes increasingly worrisome for the continent. While flexibility remains essential, a degree of institutionalisation to ensure ownership of the agenda, priorities, and deliverables can enhance the EPC’s effectiveness and guarantee tangible outcomes from the summits. The EU and non-EU countries could advance a common understanding on how to use the EPC in favour of candidate countries’ advancement when it comes to foreign and security policy coordination, with a priority on support to Ukraine.

The upcoming Summit will be an opportunity to reconfirm the United Kingdom’s role on the continent and potentially reengage with Turkey more effectively. This occasion should be used wisely to consolidate the initiative, select new hosts for 2025 (most probably Albania and Denmark), and leverage the platform for the benefit of the entire continent. In times of geopolitical change, every available forum should be employed to address the foreign and security policy challenges facing the whole of Europe.

ENDNOTES

1 First, a minilateral meeting, mediated by the French president Emmanuel Macron and European Council President Charles Michel, was held between the Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in an effort to promote a lasting peace between the two. Accordingly, the EU has sent a CSDP mission. The EPC’s set up the framework for this to happen and created strong incentives for this to happen sooner than with other collaborative security platforms. Additionally, France and the UK agreed to revitalise the UK-France Summits and shape a renewed bilateral agenda after five years.

2 For example, the platform paved the way for the creation of a training programme on cybersecurity for non-EU members under this threat. Despite the modest progress, two major events obscured the EPC’s added value. First, the cancellation of the Azerbaijani president after the Azerbaijani military takeover of the Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the increasing escalation in the Western Balkans between Serbia and Kosovo highlighted the limited European common agency to diffuse tensions and mediate crises on its own continent.

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