

Continental diplomacy for a new era: The European Political Community from Prague to Copenhagen

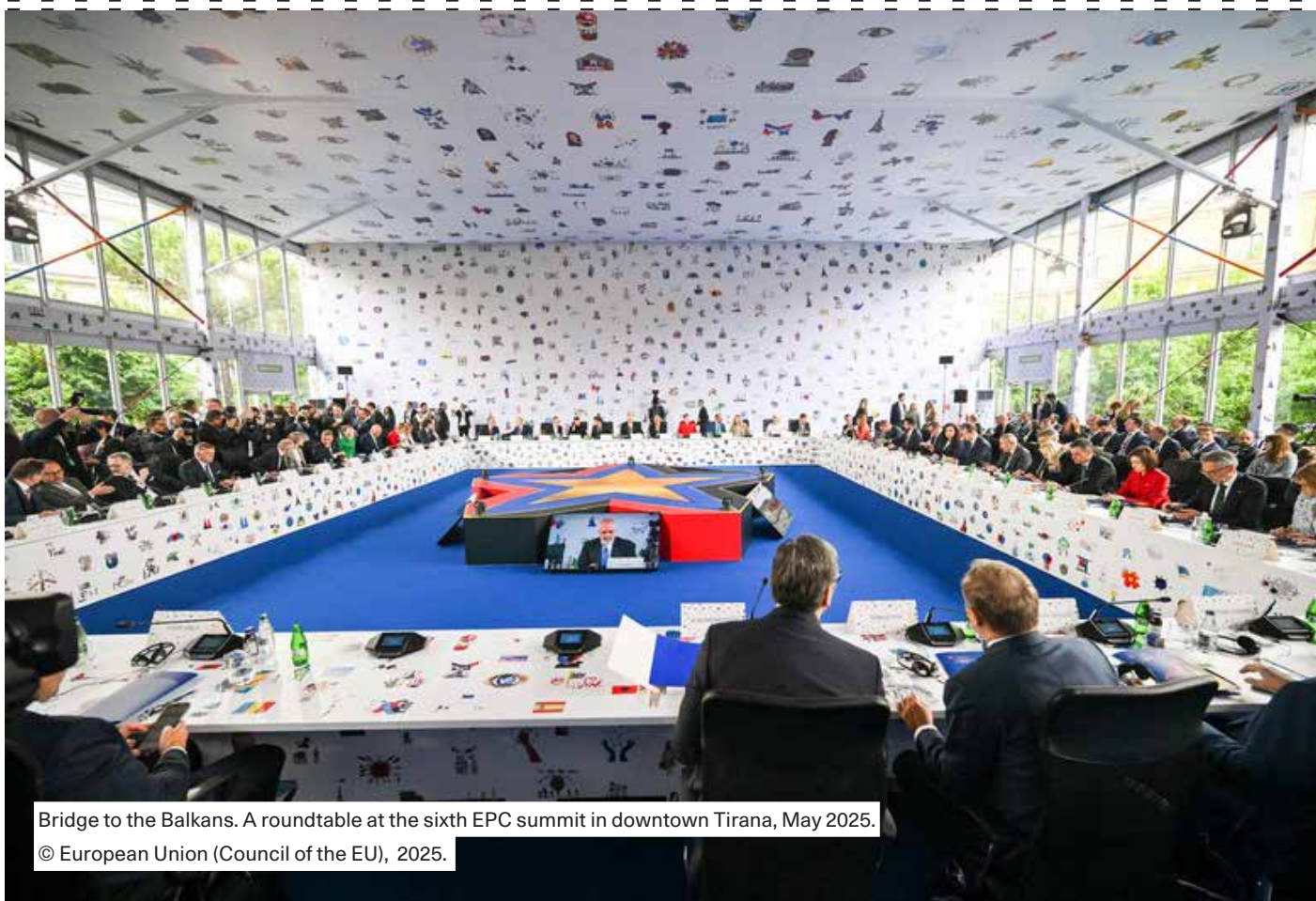
Antoine Michon

Luuk van Middelaar

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Old castles for a new era. Freshly-elected Keir Starmer hosted the EPC at Blenheim Palace - Churchill's birthplace - in July 2024.
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Bridge to the Balkans. A roundtable at the sixth EPC summit in downtown Tirana, May 2025.
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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan greets Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during the inaugural summit...



...and one year later, Pashinyan met Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev around the table.

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Executive Summary

- The EPC's seventh meeting in Copenhagen on 2 October 2025, with 47 leaders representing every region of continental Europe except Belarus and Russia, should dispel any initial scepticism about the need and appetite for a pan-European summit. Attendance is high and the meetings take place every six months.
- The guest list, based on Europe's geography, is ultimately a matter of geopolitics and diplomacy: who is on the list and who is not is political signalling, decided by the host government.
- The EPC derives its political strength and effectiveness from its informality. The day is organized in such a way that after a plenary session, break-out gatherings are held with informal and impromptu meetings between leaders facilitated throughout the day.
- Only heads of state and government participate, to ensure discussions remain strategic. Personal diplomacy among leaders, however unpredictable, is indispensable in an era of geopolitics.
- First held in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the summits have actively supported Ukraine both symbolically and practically with specific interventions.
- The EPC has the potential to act as a European equivalent to the annual UN General Assembly. Intra-European conflicts and disputes have already been mediated and discussed at the summit. Several such conflicts could be candidates for similar negotiation within the EPC as a safe space for leaders to meet informally.
- The EPC could also fulfil a role that has been vacated by the OSCE – largely moribund as Russia and the US both hold seats on the Council – as a pan-European forum to address shared security challenges and interests.
- As a meeting of sovereign states, the European Political Community is a critical discussion space for the continent. It is the only place where those countries that are outside the EU and NATO can gather with the rest of their European family as equals, to foster trust and solidarity in geopolitical times.

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I Introduction

On 2 October 2025, more than 47 heads of state and government from across Europe are set to meet at Bella Centre, Copenhagen. Three years after France's President Emmanuel Macron suggested gathering Europe 'in the truth of its geography' in a new continental forum,¹ the seventh summit of the European Political Community (EPC) will convene in Denmark. Adhering to the format of the 2022 founding summit in Prague, leaders will meet to discuss and confront the challenges and threats facing Europe.

In a summit day with packed meeting rooms, dozens of unscripted side meetings and hundreds of handshakes, the basic message communicated by the assembly of leaders in their customary family photo is that 'We are Europe'. In this geopolitical age of great powers and new security concerns, the importance of territory and geography has come to the fore. The Copenhagen summit will offer a platform to the sovereign states of Europe – twenty of which are non-EU members – on which to showcase their shared strategic interests, based on a geographic and historic destiny, and to discuss and shape them together.

The European Political Community has gradually dispelled initial scepticism over its informal style and ambiguous mandate, and over the frequency of its meetings in an already crowded international summit schedule. Concerns that it would be just a waiting room for EU candidate countries have also been laid to rest. As demonstrated by the sustained high attendance at each summit, the EPC has become an essential piece of the political and diplomatic conversation in a war-facing continent, a fitting and timely response to the demise of Europe's post-Cold War order.

Although some of the summit exchanges in Copenhagen will likely be driven by the news of the day (such as the latest situation in Ukraine), the underlying significance of such conversations lies in their political nature. The talks are held among leaders, meeting as sovereign equals, discussing shared interests away from bureaucratic procedure, stifled protocol and the normative mentality typical of most contemporary European diplomacy. These features of informal summitry are the European Political Community's main strengths.

As suggested in the Brussels Institute for Geopolitics' first report on the EPC: The new club enables its members to come together and strategize as

sovereign states in ways not dissimilar to what those states did in 1989 or 1945, or in 1815 or even in 1648, when hard questions about war, peace and order demanded novel answers. Confronting the very same questions in the present, Europe is reaching back to its past, to the methods and often forgotten practices that once gave birth to the modern state system itself.²

In and through the European Political Community, Europe has unearthed an older incarnation of itself, taking on the ancient diplomatic mantle of a polity of sovereign states.

In this second Report, we offer an assessment of the body's progress and its future prospects based on conversations with diplomats from across the continent who have been closely involved with proceedings.³ The emerging picture is that, perhaps unintentionally but by force of strategic necessity, the EPC is beginning to lay the foundations for a renewed and adjusted European security architecture. In particular, it can fill the crucial role left vacant by the OSCE, the Vienna-based pan-European organization that, not least due to Russia's membership, appears to be moribund.

Before laying out that case below, the Report first looks at the established EPC practice after the first six (soon to be seven) summits, analysing its roles and strengths. Even if some of the forum's achievements seem insubstantial to observers – as a result of which academic and intellectual interest in it has dropped considerably since its launch⁴ – the fact that over 40 heads of state or government keep coming back to this deeply (geo)political gathering twice a year should give pause for thought. Alongside NATO, the EU and other institutions actively remodelling themselves to provide Europe with collective agency for our uncertain times, the European Political Community has its own distinct role to play, as a new stage for intracontinental diplomacy.

II The European Political Community in practice

Geopolitics of the guest list

For a body drawing its strength from personal encounters between participants rather than from communiqués or other deliverables, the guest list is key. Who is invited? Who will attend? And who decides on the invitations?

The French president's initial proposal contained a contradiction regarding membership eligibility. In his 9 May 2022 speech in Strasbourg, Emmanuel Macron suggested the European Political Community would be a 'new organization' gathering 'democratic European nations adhering to a bedrock of shared values'.⁵ Had his European colleagues observed these criteria, the idea of a continental gathering would have struggled to take off. Adherence to the requirements on democratic values would have closed the door to Turkey and Azerbaijan, and their absence would in turn have cooled British enthusiasm. With Brexit acrimonies still fresh, London would not have relished joining a club composed mainly of EU members and candidates, plus some of the bloc's very close partners, such as Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. Without Turkey and the UK, the two most important European powers outside the EU alongside Ukraine, the EPC would have lost its *raison d'être* as the embodiment of Europe as a continent.

After intense backstage negotiations, EU leaders clarified the EPC's scope and aims in their June 2022 summit: it would be 'a platform for political coordination for ... all European countries with whom we have close relations'.⁶ The focus was no longer on democracy and on a formal organization, and this dual move paved the way for a guest list centred on geography and shared interests, clearing the path for the UK and Turkey. Their final presence in Prague came after fervent lobbying and special logistical arrangements by the Czech government – the hosts wanted the Turkish president to attend 'at almost any political cost' – and on 6 October 2022 the mission was accomplished. Forty-four heads of state and government stood among the splendour of Prague Castle.⁷

The message of that summit's family photo was aimed at the leaders *not* invited: Russian president Vladimir Putin, whose decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022 had plunged the continent into its biggest geopolitical crisis since the Cold War; and his loyal ally, Belarussian president Aleksandr Lukashenko. The Prague EPC guestlist expressed the hard strategic fault-line that has cleaved through the continent, with European states on one side and the Russian Federation and Belarus on the other. Indeed, while some states, such as Hungary, waver, only Turkey, a Black Sea neighbour to both Ukraine and Russia, has the power and will to remain neutral.

At later EPC summits, the guest list became the thing the media watches for – all the more so because there is no joint statement, and few concrete

cooperation projects to report on. Many observers were therefore quick to label the format as doomed after Turkish president Erdoğan skipped the second, third and fourth summits,⁸ until he attended the latest two.

After the Prague summit, the microstates Andorra, Monaco and San Marino flagged their interest and were welcomed at Chisinau. Their presence, which might be considered a detail by some, underscores the European Political Community's basic rule that all states are equal and the sovereignty of each is respected, however small its territory.

In deciding the guest list, the host country has some leeway. While EU representatives had been present from the start, in 2024 the British hosts also invited the secretary generals of NATO, the Council of Europe and the OSCE to Blenheim Palace. This decision brought all relevant continental organizations to the EPC table and ensured the EU institutions would not dominate.

In a remarkable act of political communication, the Spanish, British and Albanian governments invited Belarussian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya to their summits. This gave the 'leader in exile', the democratic winner of Belarus's 2020 presidential election, a platform to meet numerous European leaders, as well as to highlight that the fate of Ukraine and of democracy in Belarus are 'intertwined'⁹ and that 'Europe's security is impossible without a free Belarus'.¹⁰

Finally, the incoming Danish presidency has also emphasized the geopolitical import of the guest list by inviting representatives from both Greenland and the Faroe Islands to Copenhagen. Their inclusion is a thinly veiled message to Washington, as it comes after months of threats by President Trump to use military force or economic coercion to seize control of Greenland. The presence of Greenland and the Faroe Islands in the greater European family photo is a pointed diplomatic move bolstering the rebuttals issued by the Danes against any attack on the sovereignty of their autonomous territory by the US.

A day at the summit

Hosts are fully responsible for the preparation, schedule and course of their summit. The venue is critical for the atmosphere among the attendees

but also for outside perception. Half of the summits have taken place in isolated castles, with space for private meetings fostering intimacy and trust among guests. Leaders are able to engage in meaningful conversations, sometimes held without advisors or interpreters (who are always available for consultation but maintain a discreet distance from discussions). Beyond the photo opportunities of two leaders sitting on lawn chairs tackling a diplomatic dispute, the setting is an essential component of the EPC's success.

Side encounters are often planned well in advance by advisors and are carefully scheduled, but spontaneous asides are also facilitated. During the summit, the small delegations accompanying each president or prime minister are mostly kept away from their political bosses to encourage this spontaneity.

Spanning a full day, summits usually kick off with a publicly broadcast plenary session centred on Ukraine and hard security issues, with interventions by some pre-selected leaders (attention being paid to the EU/non-EU balance). Leaders, assisted by one or two advisors, then break into three or four groups for thematic discussions, each of which is co-chaired by one EU and one non-EU leader. These allow for more or less unscripted discussions, framed by short policy papers provided by the host country. A former participant insists that the small groups and the time leaders that have to make their points can render the discussions 'quite frank', allowing for actual substantive debates during which positions can evolve. On most occasions, a plenary meeting follows where conclusions from sessions are shared with all, before mini-lateral meetings in diverse formats take place in the margins. Press conferences by the host and national leaders conclude the day.

Although some hosts have been adamant that the breakout sessions are prepared in advance (Spain organized a leaders' advisors meeting in Brussels a few days ahead of the Granada summit and the UK partnered with think-tanks for preparatory talks), others leave more room for the co-chairs to run their groups as they deem fit. Concrete initiatives of any kind pertaining to the themes discussed during the roundtables can be put forward at any point before or during the summit, by leaders or through their advisors' network.

With leaders agreeing to continue steering the EPC themselves, their Europe or EU advisors (or 'sherpas') are the ones actually preparing the summits through a very loose and informal network. The sherpas meet once or twice

ahead of each summit and coordinate mainly through email. Due to time constraints, preparatory calls between them usually focus on logistical and practical aspects rather than preparing their bosses' conversation.

Should the EPC be considered an institution?

Although they all attend, the personal interest of leaders in the proceedings can vary widely. For some the official programme and a couple of side meetings are enough before flying back home, where the daily work of running a government waits. German chancellor Olaf Scholz, among the more reluctant participants, was concerned that the EPC would overshadow other existing formats that engage with non-EU states and institutionalize beyond a meeting forum (his successor, Friedrich Merz, returned from his first summit in Tirana very satisfied, as it had enabled him, early in his mandate, to meet many peers in one day). Other leaders or governments are driving forces, putting forward ideas and initiatives, such as France (so far the only country with a permanent special envoy for the EPC). President Macron no doubt considers the EPC a key part of his European legacy, and he has repeatedly called for the increasing of its profile and remit.¹¹ The governments of the UK, Albania and Moldova have likewise been active participants, the three non-EU hosts to date. Czechia, host of the inaugural summit, still feels a special responsibility for its success.

From the outset, the forum faced a classic organizational tension. Would it be possible to maintain the informal, free-floating character of the summits with a minimum of administrative coordination and follow-up? Paris in particular preferred a form of institutionalization to secure its continuity, whereas others (such as Berlin and London) favoured informality, including the avoidance of budgetary and logistical discussions. Not least because where would such a secretariat be based? Who would lead it? Where would the staff come from and what power dynamics would it entail? At the Tirana summit, a compromise was found with the establishment of the 'Quint'. This coordination mechanism pools the current host with the previous two and the next one, plus the cabinet of the President of the European Council (which has been assuming a *de facto* secretariat role and providing logistical support upon hosts' requests since the first summit).¹² This leaves the host country in the driving seat, while allowing it to draw on earlier experiences and to ensure a smooth transition to its successor.

Institutionalization is a matter of degree. As BIG has argued before: ‘By meeting in Prague *and* deciding to reconvene, leaders have already turned the European Political Community into an institution in a very basic sense.’¹³ Leaders confirmed the body’s name, gave it regularity and assigned a series of alternating EU and non-EU venues, with the EU hosts determined by the bloc’s rotating Council presidency. The latter decision has played out as an essential feature.

Alternating EU and non-EU hosts reassures some members that the EPC will remain a non-EU-led forum. It also creates a dynamic among the non-EU states, prompting them to apply and lobby informally for the right to organize a summit. For practical reasons, summits hosted by EU members take place back-to-back with an informal autumn meeting of the European Council, which can overshadow the EPC gathering; this will be the case in Copenhagen. For non-EU countries, the occasion carries more weight and they tend to devolve much more energy in their summits. For them it is an opportunity, in the words of one interviewee, to ‘shape the European agenda ... and give our contribution to the future of Europe’ as well as to gain visibility leading to business and tourism opportunities. For different reasons, Moldova, the UK and Albania found considerable symbolic significance in being ‘the centre of European diplomacy for a day’.

This dynamic explains the high interest among non-EU states in hosting a future summit, with a waiting list forming. Willing to satisfy the numerous requests, while postponing discussions on a potential reduction in the frequency of summits, EPC members agreed in Tirana on the future presidencies: Armenia and Ireland will host the 2026 summits, Switzerland and Greece will share the responsibility in 2027 before Azerbaijan and Latvia take over in 2028. Inscribing it firmly on the calendar, leaders have secured the European Political Community’s future. How much of its potential will be realized hinges on future events and the political impetus leaders give to it.

EPC summit highlights, 2022–25

Prague, Czechia – 6 October 2022

- First summit attended by 44 heads of state and government including Ukraine, United Kingdom (UK) and Turkey
- Agreement on rotating presidencies with subsequent summits to be held in Moldova, Spain and UK
- Mediation meetings between:
 - Azerbaijan and Armenia (held by President of the European Council and French president)
 - Serbia and Kosovo (held by EU's High Representative)
- Franco-British deals on migration, nuclear cooperation and the relaunch of bilateral summits after months of disagreement

Chisinau, Moldova – 1 June 2023

- Summit on the 'frontline' of Russia's war organized with the logistical support of several states
- Invitation extended to micro-states Andorra, Monaco and San Marino and European Parliament President Roberta Metsola
- Increased support for Moldova's EU integration, various bilateral and EU support packages announced and creation of Moldova Support Group
- Initial discussion on the training of Ukrainian military pilots, leading post-summit to the 'F-16 coalition'

Granada, Spain – 5 October 2023

- Turkey and Azerbaijan absent, only a few weeks after the Azerbaijani offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- First participation of Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya
- Migration discussion set up by UK and Italy with leaders from Albania, France, the Netherlands and the European Commission, despite host's disagreement
- Cancellation of the concluding press conference after the argument between the Spanish and British PMs regarding the migration roundtable

Blenheim Palace, United Kingdom – 18 July 2024

- First meeting for newly elected PM, Keir Starmer, with his non-NATO counterparts
- Invitation extended to secretary generals of NATO, Council of Europe and OSCE, and second participation of Belarus opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya
- Absence of Turkey's President Erdogan due to the UK's difficulties in accommodating logistical demands; represented instead by Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan
- First large multilateral initiative with UK's 'Call to action' regarding Russia's shadow fleet of sea vessels (44 + EU endorsements – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey not endorsing)

Budapest, Hungary – 7 November 2024

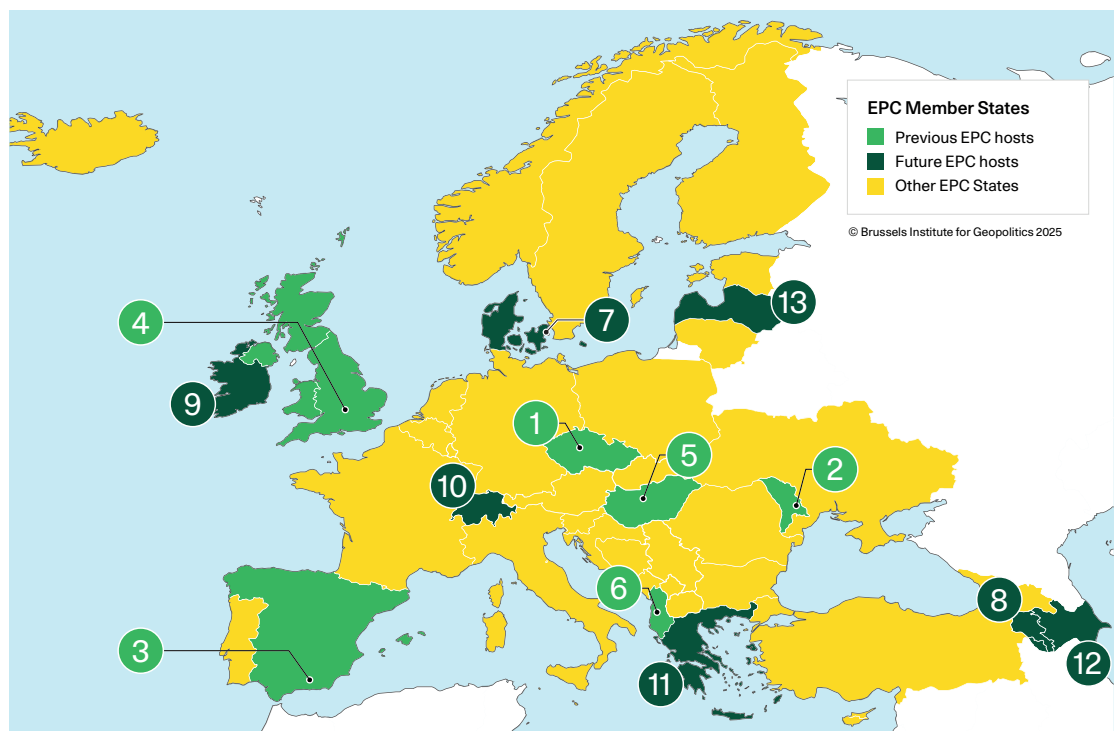
- Held the day after Donald Trump's re-election as US president, offering leaders a first opportunity to discuss the impact on European security
- Presence of 42 heads of state and government, but absence of Chancellor Olaf Scholz due to German coalition crisis
- Meeting between Cypriot and Turkish presidents with participation of their Greek and Albanian counterparts

Tirana, Albania – 16 May 2025

- Coordination call between leaders of France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine and the UK with President Trump
- Talks between UK PM and EU leaders ahead of EU-UK negotiations
- Direct discussions aimed at a peace agreement between the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders
- Call for enhanced cooperation between the EPC and the Council of Europe by the latter's Parliamentary Assembly
- Adoption of informal Quint coordination format and sequencing of future summits until 2028 – *see map opposite*

Copenhagen, Denmark – 2 October 2025

- Greenland and the Faroe Islands invited to attend.



III Roles and strengths

The European Political Community's main purpose is to foster trust and a sense of unity in geopolitical times. There is no other place where leaders from across Europe can speak as sovereign equals about their shared security interests. As its early practice makes clear, the EPC works best as a conversational space, rather than as a policymaking or pronouncement arena. Its apparent disregard for concrete deliverables and official communiqués makes the summits attractive for presidents and prime ministers.

In essence, the EPC today fulfils four roles: a platform to demonstrate solidarity with Ukraine; a roundtable for discussing shared strategic interests; a UN-style setting favouring intracontinental conflict resolution; and, finally, a political one-stop shop to strike all kinds of side deals.

Solidarity with Ukraine

By offering centre-stage to the military-fatigues-wearing Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the EPC underscores Europe's solidarity with the country at war. Present by video link at the first Prague summit, the Ukrainian president has attended all successive meetings in person. His presence at the Mimi Castle near Chisinau was poignant; the castle stands a bare fifteen kilometres from Moldova's pro-Russian breakaway republic of Transnistria, so almost within Putin's proverbial shooting range.

Drawing the greater European family together in response to the Russian onslaught in Ukraine was the European Political Community's main initial purpose. Ukraine wants a secure European home, on this side of the new geopolitical schism across the continent. While European Union membership was promised in June 2022 by EU leaders, all the main actors know Ukraine's accession will take a long time. There is a war to end, a peace to secure, reforms to achieve and conditions to fulfil. In contrast, inclusion into the European family through the EPC has been free, full and immediate.

Beyond such symbolism, there are practical benefits for Ukraine too. EPC summits allow for regular coordination on urgent and longer-term civilian and military support. For instance, after months of media pressure and numerous requests by President Zelenskyy, the 2023 Chisinau summit hosted the initial meeting of the 'F-16 coalition' that would be formally established at the Vilnius NATO summit a year later; it associates ten EPC countries, Canada and Ukraine.¹⁴ The Ukrainian president has held numerous bilateral meetings with his counterparts in the margins of each EPC summit, resulting in many subsequent pledges of support. The platform has thus proved instrumental in sustaining momentum for support to Ukraine.

The absence of formally negotiated summit conclusions, to which all leaders would need to subscribe, frees up the conversation for countries with a softer stance towards Russia (Serbia, Turkey and previous host Hungary, as well as future hosts Azerbaijan and Armenia). As the EPC is not a formal institution with competences – let alone siloed bureaucratic departments – discussions about Ukraine flow naturally from hard security matters such as weapons deliveries to issues like civilian and judiciary support.

A key diplomatic call took place between US president Trump and the British, French, German, Polish and Ukrainian leaders gathered at the EPC Tirana summit. It was held amid European concerns about US–Russian talks on a potential ceasefire in Ukraine. The call followed the creation of the 'Coalition of the Willing'¹⁵ in the spring, another format involving the UK alongside EU states; it prefigured a joint White House visit by a slightly different group of European leaders in August 2025. It is such ad hoc plural representation that allows the continent to express its shared strategic and security interests vis-à-vis outside powers

A strategic roundtable

In the diplomatic landscape, the European Political Community stands out for being steered by national leaders and for existing at summit level only, without ministerial or other bodies (which the EU, NATO and even the summit-driven G7 all have). Its protocol does not allow attendance by any country representative apart from heads of state and government, with only very rare exceptions.¹⁶ This feature lends the EPC a level of authority, legitimacy and influence that is crucial for any strategic debate. With leaders at the helm, the body can set the broad agenda for collective action on shared security concerns.

Successive hosts and participants have organically reached a consensus, agreeing that shared security interests – rather than values or trade – should drive the agenda. Beyond the war in Ukraine and hard security, this has included issues such as energy security and migration, but also – at more recent summits – economic security, drug trafficking and ‘foreign information manipulation and interference’. These broader security topics are transnational in nature; any efficient policy framework should incorporate a multilateral component and associate essential players such as the UK, Turkey or the Balkan states. Obviously, all these threats are clearly identified by the states and other international organizations, each working to put forward solutions. But no existing institution has the mandate, the membership or the means to launch and structure fully integrated Europe-wide responses.

This is true of three institutions in particular: the EU, NATO and the Council of Europe. The European Union, holding the strongest normative power and widest mandate (with the major exception of hard security), is restricted by the non-membership of twenty EPC countries and holds very distinct types of relationship with each of them. NATO has been expanding its mandate to include several aspects of hybrid threats, but it remains a US-led alliance for collective defence. It also leaves out approximately a third of EPC members, despite recent endeavours to consolidate its ‘European pillar’. The Council of Europe has been the institution most nervous about the arrival of a new European conference, not least because its membership is almost identical to that of the EPC.¹⁷ However, the focus of the Strasbourg-based body is on human rights, upholding democratic principles and the rule of law, which curtails its mandate and makes it unsuitable as a strategic forum.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is the most natural candidate for the functions the EPC is quietly picking up. The club of 50+ states headquartered in Vienna should be the obvious recipient of continental security discussions. It counts all EPC states among its members, except for Kosovo. A product of the mid-1970s Cold War *détente*, it was convened to facilitate dialogue on more comprehensive security, with the US and Russia both at the table. After the Cold War, its role in collective security remained largely aspirational, notwithstanding concrete work on issues from arms control to election monitoring. Political will was both the reason for its creation and the cause of its demise. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, the pan-European organization has been largely frozen by Moscow's veto power. An inability to mediate intra-European conflicts in Ukraine, the Balkans and Eurasia has further delegitimized it.¹⁸ The OSCE's place in European security architecture has lost meaning at a moment of real urgency when it should have come into its own.

The European Political Community offers an alternative space for a strategic conversation on these critical issues, beyond the usual policy-oriented machinery. This flexibility gives leaders freedom to think aloud and find common ground without being boxed in by formal processes. Building a common perspective among leaders can be a major achievement in itself. In other cases, leaders leverage their gathering to jointly set the strategic agenda or give a political steer to other institutions or their own governments.

This potential was exploited early on. Since the Chisinau summit, regular side meetings of the 'Moldova support group' (involving France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, the UK and EU institutions) have given concrete and symbolic support to its president Maia Sandu and the country's EU trajectory. These leaders' meetings provide strategic guidance to the broader, policy-oriented Moldova Partnership Platform, made up of over 30 states and 15 international organizations. The aim is to assist Chisinau in resisting Russian interference, dealing with the fallout of the war in Ukraine and advancing its European integration.

A European General Assembly

Just as important for the vitality of EPC summits as its official plenary stage is what happens at the fringes. The informality of discussions, the number of bi-, tri- and mini-lateral meetings occurring in the margins of each summit,

whether choreographed or spontaneous, and the high number of leaders who can literally bump into each other, mean that the EPC looks like a smaller European version of the United Nations General Assembly week. The annual UN diplomatic high mass, known as UNGA, brings dozens of leaders, hundreds of foreign ministers and thousands of diplomats from across the world to New York every September.

Beyond the hustle and bustle of both occasions, there is a deeper similarity at work. What the United Nations does globally, the European Political Community offers the continent: a space to defuse diplomatic tensions, resolve conflicts or even make peace. At the UN headquarters, leaders of hostile nations (such as the Iranian president and his US counterpart) can hold a low-key meeting, without the full pomp and media limelight of official visits, unhindered by logistical and scheduling challenges. In the same way, the EPC offers a conducive, neutral space for political dialogue between the continent's quarrelling and warring neighbours.

This is how Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan came to meet on the sidelines of the Prague summit, in their first ever face-to-face interaction. Due to political tensions between their countries, the two leaders would otherwise not have met. The invitation by the Armenian leader to his Turkish counterpart to the Yerevan summit to be held in 2026 has already been publicly characterized as a major diplomatic breakthrough.¹⁹

More recently, the Tirana summit saw Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders coming together, amidst intense negotiations to conclude a peace treaty between the two countries. Despite failing to thwart the Azerbaijani offensive on Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, EPC summits have been, since Prague, regular opportunities identified by both countries for advancing negotiations. Early sessions were facilitated by President of the European Council Charles Michel, alongside the French and German leaders. Similarly, multiple negotiation sessions have been held between the presidents of Serbia and Kosovo with the EU's High Representative, even amid escalating tensions on the ground.

The European continent needs this peace-making quality, in particular to deal with instability in the Caucasus and the Balkans. But other protagonists have made use of it too. In October 2022, after a dispute over cross-Channel

migration, Prime Minister Liz Truss and President Macron chose Prague Castle as the place to put an end to a very public Franco-British war of words.

A political forum

As a high-level get-together, the European Political Community also functions as a political forum, where leaders can discuss and decide all kinds of deals and arrangements. As the then Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte and his Albanian counterpart Edi Rama put it in a joint op-ed back in 2022: 'The EPC should be a workspace where we can meet and do business, whether an EU member or not.'²⁰

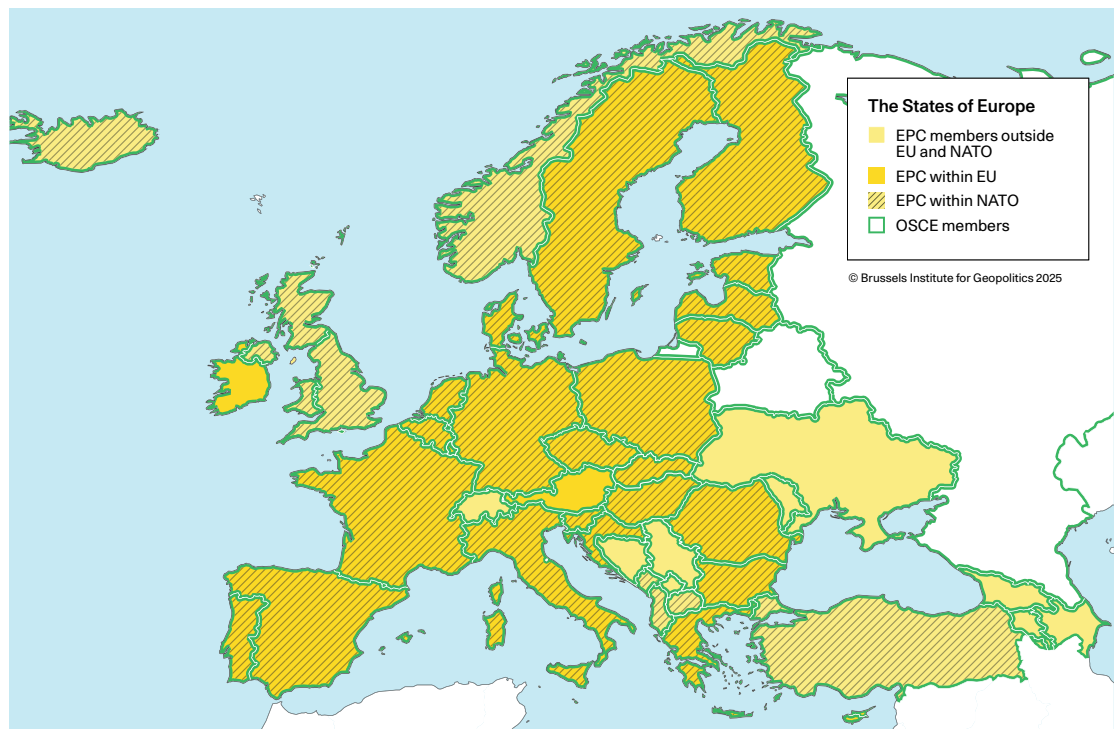
Successive hosts have been pressed by their peers to preserve ample time and space for informal encounters. This opportunity is especially cherished by leaders from non-EU states, who do not engage with their peers on a regular basis and have fewer occasions for substantial face-to-face exchanges. The EU candidates among them also appreciate the EPC's spirit of equality, in which they are not treated as 'pupils' expected to show progress on their accession homework.

Some governments, such as those in Paris and London, are adamant they must leave the meetings with concrete deliverables to communicate to their domestic audiences. Various types of format are on offer, from purely bilateral deals and statements to multilateral agreements, which are then implemented by the competent institutions.

At the Prague summit, France engineered a trilateral agreement with Portugal and Spain: they decided to relaunch discussions on the MidCat gas pipeline, shortly thereafter replaced by the H2Med project, an undersea pipeline destined to become Europe's first hydrogen corridor by 2030. In Chisinau, French, Moldovan and EU Commission leaders initiated the process of Moldova joining (initially based on a derogation) the EU's 'Roam like at home' framework, which ensures citizens can use their domestic data plans in the rest of the EU.

Freshly elected UK prime minister Keir Starmer took the opportunity of hosting the Blenheim summit to launch a 'Call to action' to disrupt the functioning of Russia's shadow fleet of vessels transporting oil sanctioned by the EU and G7+ states. Largely symbolic, the document was endorsed by 45 EPC states (and the EU), and it calls for greater coordination between

states and with the private sector to enforce measures already adopted and to develop further ones. Later endorsed by the US and Canada, it was followed up by several expert meetings in different formats, demonstrating that the EPC can give an impulse to practical enhanced intergovernmental cooperation at expert level. Additional sanctions were also coordinated and adopted following the call. Furthermore, the UK has used the summits for bilateral initiatives to tackle organized crime and irregular migration.²¹



IV The way ahead

What will happen with the European Political Community once a settlement between Ukraine and Russia has been reached? A recent US push for peace talks notwithstanding, that outcome is not likely to happen soon. Yet after hostilities end, the EPC will eventually lose its initial *raison d'être* as a response to the largest continental war since 1945. Questions then will emerge on the utility, frequency and added value of the summits.

In BIG's view, the states of Europe will need something like the European Political Community well into the future, with or without peace in Ukraine. Russia's 2022 invasion is a symptom of a broader historic change, which can be summarized as the return of history or of great power politics, and the overriding need for security and stability that comes with it. The urgent need for the states of Europe to discuss such matters as sovereign equals will outlive the current conflict.

A post-Ukraine security order

As BIG has argued previously, even if the Russo-Ukrainian war does not end up in the same league of epoch-making events as the First and Second World War, it is of major pan-European significance, asking not for a full reinvention of the continent's order (as in 1918 and 1945) but for its re-adjustment.²² Some of that re-adjustment has already taken place, for instance with Finland and Sweden joining NATO after long periods of neutrality and non-alignment. But major pieces of a future puzzle still need to be worked out.

First and foremost, this concerns the arrangements for Ukraine itself. Coordination on Ukraine-related matters, from the potential deployment of troops by a Coalition of the Willing to the country's reconstruction and the repatriation of refugees, will remain high on the European leaders' agenda. The EPC will continue to offer a useful platform for the discussion of these issues, especially as it is attended by all Ukraine's neighbouring allies including Poland, Romania, Moldova and Turkey.

But European security beyond the Ukraine war requires broader consideration. The Moscow power politics at play in the invasion will not disappear once a political solution to the conflict is found, and European states can deal with Russia better jointly than separately. The rapid decrease in Washington's concern for European security matters is another factor to be reckoned with. These hard facts will soon force Europeans to take stock of a new post-Helsinki – or even post-Atlantic – geopolitical order and shape an overarching European security architecture.

There is currently no better forum in which to initiate this conversation among the states of Europe than the European Political Community. With all states on the continent participating and institutional stakeholders such as the EU, NATO and the OSCE present, it can help to identify a common understanding of shared security interests. Among shared principles, the recognition of each state's territorial sovereignty – the central tenet of the modern international order violated by Russia – should rank highest. Exchanges should be aimed at anticipating and shaping future security dynamics for the continent, rather than being a matter of Europeans reacting to events in the Russo-Ukrainian War or to demands and decisions by (other) external actors.

As an informal body steering such a continental security conversation, the European Political Community would resemble the forerunner of the OSCE, namely the *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe* (CSCE). That platform was launched in Helsinki in 1973 and lasted until the OSCE took over as a full-blown organization two decades later.

Practically, future summit hosts could facilitate focused conversations to make the topic a recurring agenda item. These talks would enable gradual progress from one summit to the next and adaptation to a geopolitical situation in flux – while maintaining a long-term vision for a stable and secure Europe. The newly formed Quint could guide the process, until the timing is right to consolidate a new security architecture in a way that, regardless of its form, reflects the shared interests and core values of all European states. It would evolve over a number of years, but it would be a powerful symbol for such an agreement to be found or signed at a future EPC summit in Kyiv.

Intracontinental peace and security

A prerequisite for stability starts with the continent sorting out its internal conflicts. Drawing on its early experience in conflict resolution as a European General Assembly, the EPC is positioned to enhance intra-European mediation mechanisms to resolve longstanding bilateral conflicts.

The potential normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia, following recent diplomatic engagements ahead of the 2026 Yerevan summit, could be a significant milestone, ending a century of hostilities. These efforts are timely, given the very recent substantial progress towards a peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The joint declaration signed in Washington on 8 August 2025 foresees the mutual recognition of territorial integrity, the establishment of diplomatic relations, and a transit corridor between Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan exclave. The agreement was concluded after substantial progress initiated at earlier EPC meetings and it could now reshape the geopolitical dynamics in the South Caucasus. Although brokered under US supervision, in view of the White House's limited attention span, the deal's full realization will likely fall on European shoulders.

Ongoing tensions between Serbia and Kosovo also require sustained mediation efforts, which have largely been led by the EU's High Representative in recent years. Bulgaria and North Macedonia are likewise in

need of a dialogue facilitator, as historical and cultural disputes have hindered bilateral relations and delayed Skopje's EU accession.

Addressing the longstanding division in Cyprus should be another priority for the European Political Community in its General Assembly role. The island's division sours Greco-Turkish relations and hampers regional cooperation in the strategic Eastern Mediterranean, a gateway to the Middle East. Without abandoning the (stalled) UN-led mediation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, preliminary and exploratory talks could take place in the margins of a future EPC summit, as happened in Budapest between presidents Erdoğan and Christodoulides in the presence of their Greek and Albanian colleagues.

Larger European powers or neighbours without a direct stake often feel a responsibility to resolve a territorial conflict among other actors, as does the EU. The EPC provides a timely, neutral space for such interventions, provided the affected parties ask for it. In these examples, EPC mediation efforts could be steered by volunteer leaders or by the rolling Quint. While not replacing existing negotiation frameworks, the EPC could provide fresh political momentum and steer them towards appropriate formats for resolution.

An informal steering authority

The European Political Community derives its political strength and effectiveness from its informality. Rigid structures and procedures that might stifle discussion or deter broad participation should be avoided.

This is why the EPC needs to remain a leaders' forum ensuring discussions remain strategic and driven by political will. Personal diplomacy among leaders, however unpredictable at times, is indispensable in an era of geopolitics. Likewise, EPC initiatives should remain ad hoc and voluntary, driven by proposals from individual countries and respecting the political will of each. This encourages collective ownership and a more diverse range of contributions.

Yet there should be space to strengthen the European Political Community's output and efficiency. The presence and assembled authority of so many leaders at the summit could be harnessed to create an informal steering body, joining their power to that of other actors or institutions for follow-up. Leaders can build on examples such as the Blenheim 'Call to action' against the Russian shadow fleet or the Moldova support group

For instance, in discussions about Ukraine's reconstruction, future EPC hosts could involve financial and development organizations such as the EIB, the EBRD, the IMF and the World Bank to leverage more international support. In this spirit the Council of Europe has already provided input on a potential convention on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) at the Tirana summit. This demonstrates how the summit body can leverage the strength of partner institutions, while preserving its unique identity.

Another path towards strengthening the EPC would involve giving future hosts a mandate to explore flexible, ad hoc political coordination mechanisms for responding effectively to crises and events. This would imply a wider role for the presidencies or the Quint, with semester-long presidencies going beyond the mere organization of summits. The early 2025 ad hoc Ukraine meetings in Paris and London, which grew into the 'Coalition of the Willing', demonstrate the need for such crisis coordination. In that situation, an emergency summit of the European Political Community could have been called, as it would have brought together the same key actors. Currently there is no pan-European crisis mechanism. The European Political Community could play this role, offering the same flexibility and informality as ad hoc groups but with the distinct European mandate.

V Conclusion: Europe beyond the EU

By 2028, the EPC will have held summits in all the continent's regions with none left out or marginalized. The recurring images of European leaders from every corner of the continent standing together express a political 'Europe' which transcends EU membership status.

In an irony of sorts, the same Copenhagen conference venue that will welcome the upcoming EPC hosted the June 1993 European Council, where the twelve national leaders of the EU decided to offer club membership to all states formerly behind the Iron Curtain. Sixteen European states have joined the Union since then, and others aspire to do so in the future. However, the hope that all continental European states would eventually join has not materialized. Against the magnetic attraction of EU membership – which seemed so self-evident and innocuous in the early post-Cold War era – other political forces have made themselves felt.

Here the European Political Community has a part to play: Europe's security interests do not give it the luxury of being able to wait for all Russia's neighbours to gain full self-determination, for British voters to perhaps one day change their mind, for Turkish leaders to embrace democracy or for EU candidates to meet every single accession requirement. Yet all these members of the greater European family need to be part of a strategic conversation which is happening now, on an equal footing with their EU peers. If Europe's security is at stake today in Ukraine, it could well be at stake tomorrow in Moldova or Bosnia-Herzegovina, neither of which are in the EU or NATO. The European Political Community empowers those who are potentially vulnerable, while preventing the perception that political and strategic initiative is the sole responsibility of Western or Central European capitals. It serves the intracontinental diplomacy of our new geopolitical age.

Notes

1. Emmanuel Macron, 'Discours du Président de la République à l'occasion de la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe', 9 May 2022, Elysee.fr.
2. Hans Kribbe, Sébastien Lumet and Luuk van Middelaar, 'Bringing the greater European family together. New perspectives on the European Political Community', May 2023, Brussels Institute for Geopolitics, p. 6.
3. This assessment of the EPC is based on conversations with senior officials and diplomats in and from Ankara, Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, London, Paris, Prague and Tirana.
4. After productive activity in the first few months following the creation of the EPC and the early summits, academic, media and think tank engagement regarding the EPC has dramatically shrunk. Some recent analyses include: Eric Maurice and Tabea Schaumann, 'Without reform, the European Political Community risks becoming irrelevant', May 2025, European Policy Centre; Ilke Toygür and Sébastien Maillard, 'The European Political Community: Navigating the Path to Consolidation', June 2024, IE University Global Policy Center, Sciences Po and Jacques Delors Institute; Teona Giuashvili, 'The EPC and the Future of the European Order', 4 August 2024, *Geopolitics*.
5. Macron, *ibid*.
6. European Council meeting conclusions, 23 and 24 June 2022.
7. The EPC comprises the 27 EU member states, Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, San Marino, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Also present are the EU institutions (via the presidents of the European Council, Commission and Parliament as well as the High Representative) and, since the Blenheim summit, the secretary generals of the three pan-European institutions: NATO, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).
8. Officially, President Erdoğan could not attend the Moldovan summit because it took place too soon after the 2023 Turkish presidential elections, the Spanish summit because of important domestic political engagements and the British summit because the UK could not accommodate his logistical demands.
9. Archie Mitchell and Tom Watling, 'Zelensky calls on Starmer to "show leadership" and allow Ukrainian strikes on Russia', 19 July 2024, *The Independent*.
10. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, 'I am proud to represent Belarus and Belarusians here.' Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya at the European Political Community Summit – 17 May 2025, tsikhanouskaya.org.
11. Macron has on several occasions put forward the vision of the EPC as a way to integrate the continent on different levels. Economically, he mentioned the EPC was a market of 700 million consumers and should have a strategy for economic growth. He also proposed better physical interconnexions and more exchanges between its youth, exemplified by his proposal in Granada to extend the Interrail pass targeting young people to all EPC countries. Also, in his 2025 annual address to France's ambassadors, he went beyond previous statements, outlining that the EPC is the right forum for closer cooperation on the military and strategic levels between all European states as they face and are brought together by 'the same strategic challenge', while not all being members of the same organizations. (Emmanuel Macron, 'Discours du Président de la République à l'occasion de la Conférence des Ambassadeuses et des Ambassadeurs', 6 January 2025, Elysee.fr.).
12. Tellingly, whereas President Macron spoke of a 'permanent light secretariat' in his closing press conference in Tirana, host and Albanian prime minister Edi Rama called it a 'coordinating team under the auspices of the European Council President's Office'.
13. Kribbe, Lumet and Van Middelaar, *ibid.*, p. 14.
14. The F-16 coalition for Ukraine is an international group formed to train Ukrainian pilots and provide F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine to strengthen its air defences and combat capabilities. It includes Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and the UK.
15. The 'Coalition of the Willing' associates 31 states (29 EPC states as well as Australia and Canada) who are considering sending troops to Ukraine as a peacekeeping force following an eventual ceasefire, and coordinating positions on their support for Ukraine.
16. Monaco was represented on a few occasions by its Minister of State, who presides over the Council of Government, and the Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister filled in for President Erdoğan in Blenheim after the UK was not able to accommodate the president's logistical demands. Also, Belarussian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was invited to the EPC summits in Spain and in the UK.
17. Kosovo is the only EPC country that is not a member of the Council of Europe. While the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and its Parliamentary Assembly have both supported Kosovo's invitation to join the organization, the non-recognition of Kosovo as a sovereign state by six Council of Europe members (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Spain) *de facto* blocks decisive progress in its membership process.

18. In the South Caucasus, for instance, the OSCE Minsk Group co-chaired by France, Russia and the US was established in 1992 to mediate a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. With no enforcement power, it proved ineffective, and it was regularly criticized by Baku for its perceived pro-Armenian bias. After the 2023 ground operation during which Azerbaijan retook control of the disputed territories, both countries engaged in bilateral discussions mediated by other parties (EU, Russia and the US) outside that earlier framework, which was deemed outdated. As part of the recent progress mediated by the US towards a full peace treaty, both countries agreed to dismantle the group, whose original mandate is now irrelevant.
19. Vafa Guliyeva, 'Historic steps forward: Turkish leader expected in Armenia for 2026 European summit', 20 June 2025, Caliber.az.
20. Edi Rama and Mark Rutte, 'The European Political Community is a good idea', 5 October 2022, *Politico Europe*.
21. During the Blenheim Summit, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced bilateral deals with Slovenia and Slovakia to enhance the cooperation and information sharing between law enforcement agencies, focused on combating cross-border terrorism, serious and organized crime, and people smuggling. One of his predecessors, Liz Truss, had previously agreed with her French and Dutch counterparts, in the margins of the Prague summit, to deepen bilateral cooperation on tackling illegal migration.
22. Kribbe, Lumet and Van Middelaar, *ibid.*, p. 19.

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Colophon

Authors

Antoine Michon

Luuk van Middelaar

Editing

Alison Howson

Liz Waters

Visual research

Valeria Santi

Graphic design

Linda van Deursen

Tomáš Celizna

Printing and binding

Graphius, Gent

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About the authors

Antoine Michon joined the Centre for Analysis, Planning and Strategy of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs in September 2025 as a policy officer on European affairs. He previously served as a special assistant to the Ministry's EU Director and the French Special Envoy for the European Political Community (2023–24), and worked at the French General Secretariat for European Affairs (2021–23). In the summer of 2025, Antoine was a visiting researcher at the Brussels Institute for Geopolitics.

Luuk van Middelaar is the Director of the Brussels Institute for Geopolitics (BIG), which he co-founded in 2022. A historian and political theorist, his books include *The Passage to Europe* (2013) and *Alarums & Excursions* (2019). He was the chief speechwriter to European Council president Van Rompuy (2010–2014).

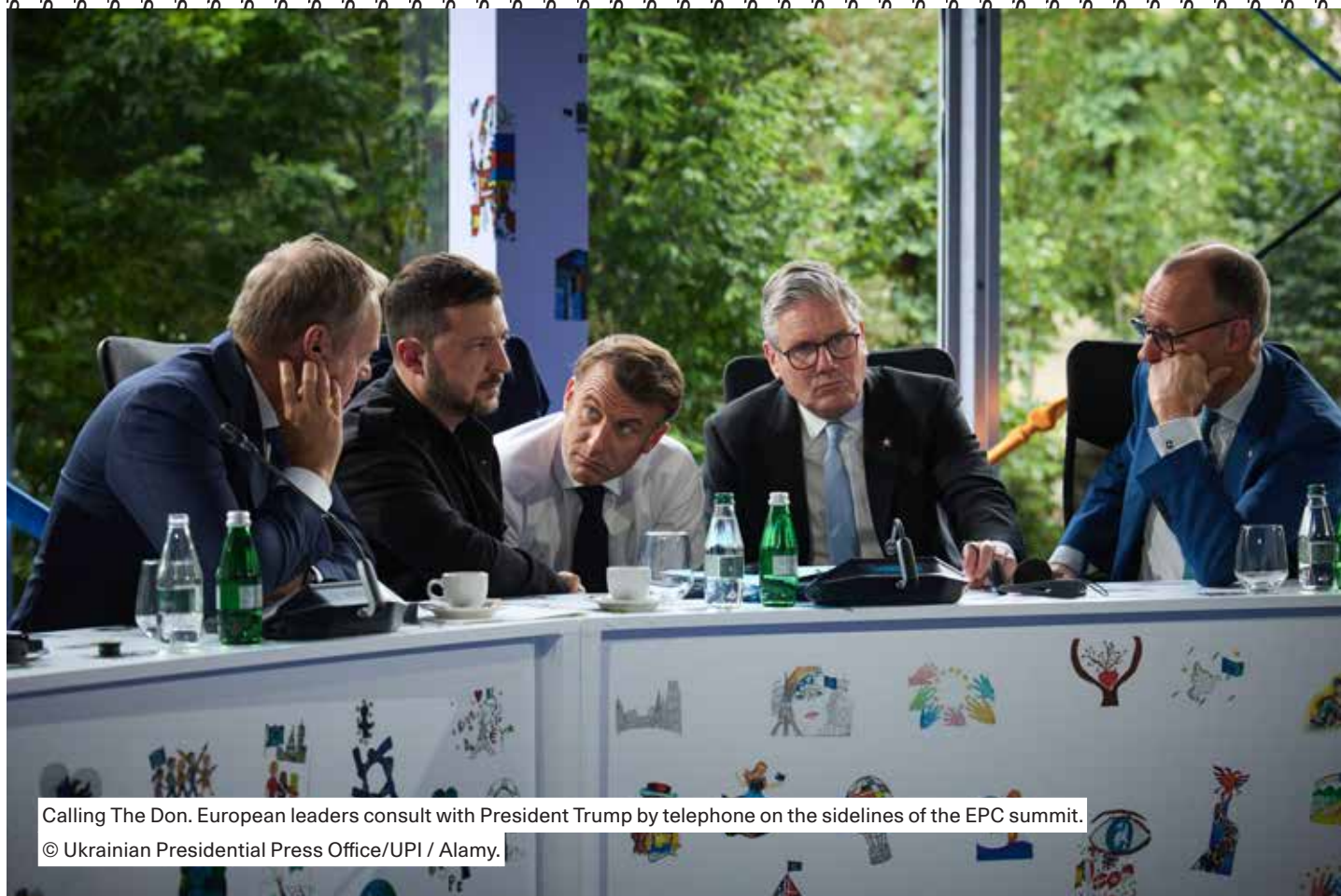
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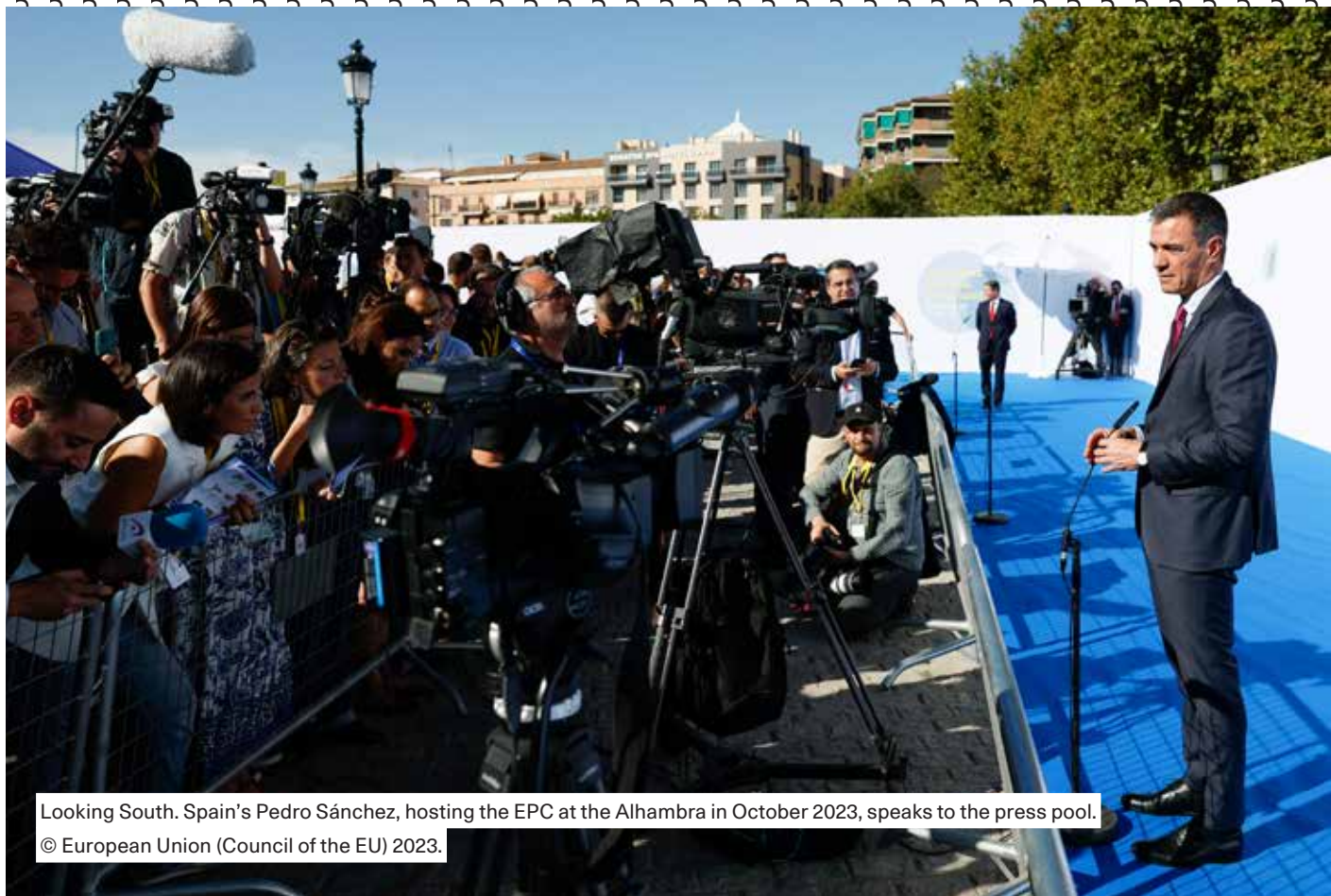
The second EPC summit saw renewed pledges of support for Moldova, intended to help Chisinau better respond to challenges from Moscow. © European Union (Council of the EU), 2025.



Calling The Don. European leaders consult with President Trump by telephone on the sidelines of the EPC summit. © Ukrainian Presidential Press Office/UPI / Alamy.



High-stakes handshakes. On home turf, Moldova's President Maia Sandu welcomes President Zelenskyy to the second EPC summit, June 2023. © European Union (Council of the EU), 2023.



Looking South. Spain's Pedro Sánchez, hosting the EPC at the Alhambra in October 2023, speaks to the press pool. © European Union (Council of the EU) 2023.

