

Outlook for the meetings of EU leaders in Prague on 6 and 7 October 2022

On 6 and 7 October 2022, the EU Heads of State or Government will meet in Prague for an informal meeting of the European Council, preceded by the inaugural meeting of the European Political Community (EPC). Seventeen non-EU European heads of state or government will join the EU-27 leaders for the first meeting of the European Political Community. The 44 leaders are expected to focus, in smaller groups, on peace and security, climate and energy, migration and economic cooperation. They could also grasp the opportunity to define jointly the modes and pace of future political and security cooperation under the new EPC format. At their subsequent informal European Council meeting, EU leaders will discuss Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, energy (notably a possible gas price cap), as well as economic issues. These three interlinked topics have been on their agenda since the outbreak of Russia's war on Ukraine. Reaffirming unity and a common vision will be central to the meeting, which serves as preparation for the regular European Council meetings of October and December 2022, at which decisions are expected to be taken. As with other such meetings held earlier this year, the European Parliament's President, Roberta Metsola, will attend the informal European Council meeting.

Inaugural meeting of the European Political Community

On 6 October 2022, EU leaders [will meet](#) with 17 non-EU European heads of state or government for the first meeting of the European Political Community in Prague. Six Western Balkans countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo,¹ Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia), five Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom will participate. The meeting will be held at the invitation of the European Council President, Charles Michel, and the Czech Prime Minister, Petr Fiala, whose country currently holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU.

Origin, initial reactions and aim of the European Political Community initiative

On Europe Day 2022, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, [proposed](#) to create a European Political Community, a framework that should foster cooperation with like-minded non-EU European partners in areas such as security, energy, transport and infrastructure. Although he stressed right from the outset that the EPC's [aim](#) would be to 'complement' and not to substitute the enlargement process, the proposal evoked [mixed reactions](#) in the Western Balkans and [wariness](#) in Ukraine. Touring the Western Balkans in the following weeks, President Michel championed the proposal, [stressing](#) that its aim was 'not to replace the EU accession process' but to allow 'immediate political integration' and 'regular political dialogue among leaders'. President Michel then [coined](#) the term 'European geopolitical community', placing foreign policy cooperation at its core; he suggested that participating states should 'meet at least twice a year' at leaders' and ministers' level. The European Council [discussed](#) the EPC in June 2022, when they agreed that the [objective](#) was 'to foster political dialogue and cooperation to address issues of common interest so as to strengthen the security, stability and prosperity of the European continent', and confirmed that there was no intention to replace enlargement.

Inaugural meeting agenda, format and possible outcome

The [agenda](#) consists of a mix of plenary sessions and roundtable discussions, whilst also enabling bilateral meetings. There will be four parallel roundtable discussions allowing European leaders to focus in smaller groups on the following subjects: 1) peace and security; 2) energy and climate; 3) economy; and 4) migration. The thematic roundtables [format](#) was [used](#) at the EU-African Union summit of 17 February 2022, where each roundtable was [co-chaired](#) by several participating countries. It remains to be seen whether the

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

meeting will bring greater clarity to the concept, focus, structure and frequency of meetings of the new EPC. President Michel [outlined](#) that 'no formal written outcome' of the meeting is envisaged.

Informal meeting of European Council members

The Prague informal European Council meeting, which President Michel will chair, follows the tradition [established](#) in recent years of organising informal meetings hosted in and by the country holding the rotating Council presidency. The objective is to allow EU leaders to build unity on topics discussed informally and hence prepare well in advance of upcoming regular meeting(s) at which decisions are expected to be taken. The [indicative leaders' agenda](#) released in September 2022 confirms this approach. The topics listed for the informal Prague meeting – Russia's war on Ukraine, energy and economic affairs – are the same as those listed for the regular European Council meetings of [20-21 October 2022](#) and [15-16 December 2022](#). EU leaders might also address, in light of possible developments, other pressing foreign policy issues. Given the informal nature, no conclusions are expected, although President Michel [has issued](#) 'oral conclusions' after such meetings in the past.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

EU leaders have discussed Ukraine at their six meetings held thus far in 2022. They will consider recent developments on the ground, where Ukraine is engaged in a robust [counter-offensive](#) aimed at recovering its territory illegally occupied by Russia. EU leaders will most probably condemn the [sham annexation referendums](#) organised by Russia in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia, and reaffirm support to Ukraine's territorial integrity within the country's internationally recognised borders. [Sanctions](#) will most probably be at the core of discussions, testing the EU's unity in countering Russia. The [new package](#) includes a cap on Russian oil export prices, which would translate a [G7 agreement](#) from September 2022 to EU level; yet Member States are [still divided](#) on this issue. At the UN General Assembly, President Michel had [stressed](#) that 'because we must stop the Kremlin's war machine, massive economic sanctions were unavoidable'. He also underlined that Russia's actions in Ukraine are acts of war, pointing to the mobilisation of reservists. EU leaders will most certainly consider several other issues, including accountability for war crimes perpetrated in Ukraine and food (in)security, as well as EU humanitarian, financial, economic and military aid.

Energy

Energy has been a rolling item on the European Council's agenda since last autumn, when EU leaders first addressed the spike in prices. The [renewed price rise](#) could trigger a discussion on energy affordability, bringing to the fore the issue of a price cap on gas transactions. This idea, while being [supported](#) by 15 Member States, was [absent](#) from the measures agreed at the [extraordinary Energy Council](#) of 30 September 2022. Such a cap would be distinct from possible further sanctions on Russia in the form of a gas price cap. Another topic for EU leaders to consider could be the reform of the electricity market, including by decoupling gas and electricity prices. Moreover, the Heads of State or Government are likely to discuss the means of protecting critical infrastructure, following the acts of [sabotage](#) on the [Nord Stream](#) pipeline, which, as [tweeted](#) by President Michel, 'appear to be an attempt to further destabilise energy supply to EU'. EU leaders could take stock of preparations for the winter undertaken at their request by the European Commission and the Member States. In her State of the Union address, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, [underlined](#) that the EU agreed on the joint storage of gas, and that storage facilities across the EU were 84 % full in early September 2022. She has also warned against Russia's continued manipulation of the European energy market and stressed the importance of phasing out dependency on Russian fossil fuels, a commitment that EU leaders [assumed](#) earlier this year.

Economic situation

EU Member States face [high inflation rates](#), estimated at 9.1 % for the euro area and at up to 10.1 % for the EU as a whole in August 2022. This is a sharp increase compared to [July 2021](#), when euro-area inflation stood at 2.2 % and overall EU inflation at 2.5 %. The [spike in energy and food prices](#), exacerbated by Russia's war on Ukraine, is largely at the root of these high inflation rates. President von der Leyen has [stressed](#) that Russia's war on Ukraine 'is a war on our energy, a war on our economy, a war on our values and a war on our future'. EU leaders might consider ways to curb inflation, and discuss economic growth as well as reform, including of the energy market. In July 2022, the European Parliament held a debate on the cost of living and the means available to 'help citizens cope with the rising cost of living'.

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