

Outcome of the European Political Community and European Council meetings in Prague on 6-7 October 2022

EU leaders met on 6 and 7 October 2022 in Prague for the inaugural meeting of the European Political Community (EPC) and an informal meeting of the European Council. At the EPC meeting, hosted by the current Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, over 40 European heads of state or government expressed unity in the face of the common challenge posed by the brutal return of war on European soil, affirmed their support to Ukraine and committed to strengthening energy cooperation. They clarified that the EPC was intended as a bi-annual informal platform – hence the absence of a declaration – for dialogue among equals at leaders' level. The EPC aims to boost cooperation on issues of continental concern – and not to be a substitute for EU policies, in particular enlargement. It was agreed that the next EPC meeting would take place in Chişinău, Moldova.

At the informal meeting of the European Council, which aimed to prepare the forthcoming formal meeting on 20-21 October 2022, EU leaders focused on Ukraine and energy. As regards Ukraine, the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, stressed that, with the successive packages of sanctions, including the agreed oil price cap, the EU was depriving Putin's regime of the ability to wage war in Ukraine and that Team Europe (EU and the Member States) had pledged €19 billion to Ukraine (military aid excepted). With respect to energy, EU leaders discussed ways of jointly addressing the energy price and security of supply challenges, and notably considered joint purchasing of gas at EU level. EU leaders also discussed the protection of critical infrastructure, which is a key element of work conducted on resilience as part of EU-NATO cooperation.

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, addressed the leaders by video-link at both meetings, stressing the importance of supporting Ukraine in defending itself. In her address to the European Council, the European Parliament's President, Roberta Metsola, emphasised that war and high energy prices had led to high inflation rates, reaching 10 % in the euro area. Following a proposal by Charles Michel, Ms Thérèse Blanchet was appointed Secretary-General of the Council.

1. Background

The [Indicative Leaders' Agenda 2022](#) included an informal meeting of the European Council on 7 October 2022, preceded a day earlier by the inaugural meeting of the European Political Community. The two events, held in Prague Castle, shared common topics – peace and security, energy security and economic issues. They also presented similarities in outcome, as no declarations were adopted, while leaders stressed, both in the EPC framework and at the informal European Council, their unity against Russia and unfailing support to Ukraine.

2. The inaugural meeting of the European Political Community

On 6 October 2022, the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU hosted the first meeting of the EPC. The meeting followed on from the [proposal](#) formulated on Europe Day 2022 by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, to establish a platform allowing EU and non-EU European countries to come together to discuss issues of common interest in a wide range of policy areas, including security, the economy and energy. The inaugural EPC meeting allowed for clarification of pending



issues such as participation, format and aim. It also helped to dissipate scepticism by emphasising that the EPC was not intended as an alternative to enlargement and that those European countries wishing and meeting the criteria would continue on their EU integration path.

Participation

The inaugural EPC meeting was attended by over 40 heads of state or government, as well as President Michel and the Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President (HR/VP) of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, was also in attendance. The Danish Prime Minister, [Mette Frederiksen](#), was absent from the inaugural EPC meeting for domestic political reasons, but [joined](#) her colleagues a day later for the informal meeting of the European Council. The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, [addressed](#) his colleagues by video-link, while the Prime Minister, Denys Shmyhal, attended the meeting in person.

As stressed by President [Macron](#), 'we share the same space, often the same history, and we have a mission to write the future together. This is the EPC.' Thus, the EPC brought together EU Member States, countries aspiring to become members of the EU (the Western Balkan countries, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Turkey), countries which have left the bloc (the United Kingdom) and countries which do not wish to join (Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland). The Prime Minister of Belgium, [Alexander de Croo](#), drew attention to the fact that 'the whole European continent [was in Prague] except two countries, Belarus and Russia' and pointed to their level of isolation, an [analysis](#) shared by the Prime Minister of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki.

An informal partnership of equals

The EPC is about fostering informal cooperation among equal partners. As stressed by the Czech Prime Minister, Petr Fiala, in his opening [remarks](#), there is, for the moment, no intention to formalise meetings or to transform the EPC into an organisation of its own. In a pre-summit [op-ed](#), the Prime Ministers of Albania, Edi Rama, and the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, stressed that the EPC 'should be driven not by bureaucracy but by flexibility' and that it 'should be guided not by fixed agendas but by priorities that concern us all'. President Michel stressed that European leaders 'listened to each other', which was the main [objective](#) and achievement of the first EPC meeting.

The idea of an informal intergovernmental gathering, on an equal footing, of heads of state or government on a continental scale was central to the joint press conference held by President Macron, the EPC's initiator, Petr Fiala, representing the host country, and the President of Moldova, Maia Sandu, representing the country which will host the next EPC meeting in the first half of 2023. She [stressed](#) that 'solidarity and trust' represent the rock on which the EPC is built.

In a way, the first EPC meeting mirrored the European Council in its early days, when meetings were informal, resembling 'fireside chats' and allowing Heads of State or Government to exchange freely on the most salient issues with the aim of identifying common solutions to common challenges. The absence of a chair is yet another element of flexibility and informality in the organisation of the EPC. This contrasts with, for example, EU-Western Balkans summits organised in the margins of informal European Council meetings by the countries holding the rotating Council Presidency – [Bulgaria](#), [Croatia](#) and [Slovenia](#) – and chaired by the European Council President.

European Political Community meeting format

As flagged in the EPRS [outlook](#), the meeting saw a mix of plenary sessions and roundtables. The number of roundtables was reduced to two, one on peace and security ([co-facilitated](#) by Slovakia and Moldova) and one on energy, climate and economy ([co-facilitated](#) by Greece and Switzerland). The format of roundtables, co-facilitated by an EU and a non-EU country, was successfully introduced at the February 2022 [EU-African Union summit](#). The format notably enabled a focus on various [crises](#) taking place on the continent, including tensions in the eastern Mediterranean, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the situation in the Western Balkans.

Bilateral meetings held on the sidelines of the EPC meeting allowed European leaders to discuss pending issues. For instance, the Prime Minister of Sweden, Magdalena Andersson, discussed the [status](#) of Sweden's NATO bid with the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Migration, a topic which was initially planned as part of a stand-alone roundtable, was discussed by leaders at bilateral meetings. This was the case, for example, between President Macron and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Liz Truss, who agreed during their meeting to, inter alia, increase cooperation on [migration](#). The Dutch Prime Minister, [Mark Rutte](#), confirmed that he discussed migration with Truss and that work should continue in a trilateral framework with France and the UK but also in a more inclusive European way.

In addition to bilateral meetings, other formats were explored with different levels of success. For example, a quadrilateral meeting was held by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, President Macron and President Michel. A [statement](#) was published after the meeting, confirming Azerbaijan's and Armenia's commitment to the [UN Charter](#) and the [1991 Alma Ata Declaration](#), in which both countries 'recognise each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty'. The meeting was key ahead of the meeting of the border commissions to be held in Brussels in the course of October 2022. No similar success was found with respect to facilitating the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. The [quadrilateral](#) meeting envisaged between the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, and the President of Kosovo,¹ Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu, in the presence of President Macron and the Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz, did not occur, being replaced by two separate trilateral meetings attended by the Franco-German duo.

Main results of the inaugural meeting of the European Political Community

European unity

The European leaders sent a strong signal of [unity](#), condemning Russia's war on Ukraine and expressing support for Ukraine. The Prime Minister of Iceland, [Katrín Jakobsdóttir](#), stressed that 'Europe stands in solidarity against the Russian invasion in Ukraine', while Prime Minister [Petr Fiala](#) stressed that 'we all know in our hearts that Ukraine will win because the truth is on their side'.

Priorities for future cooperation

European leaders jointly agreed on six work 'paths', or priority lines for cooperation. President Macron stressed that work on protecting critical [infrastructure](#) is key in light of the recent attack on [Nord Stream](#) and that a common European strategy is needed. Fighting cyber-attacks originating, for instance, in Russia or Iran also requires a joint European approach. Regional cooperation and security in the Black, Baltic and North Seas is yet another aspect in need of a common European vision. The development of an 'integrated energy strategy', in particular coordination with non-EU European partners, some of which – notably Azerbaijan and Norway – are energy producers, is needed to bring energy prices down. For Dutch Prime Minister [Mark Rutte](#), the leaders sent a clear message to the energy market that they were 'completely aligned' and 'have the joint ambition to come up with measures to bring down the gas prices'. Last but not least, youth is one area where a more integrated vision is needed on a continental scale.

The way forward

As announced by President Macron, EPC meetings will be held bi-annually. A calendar was drawn up with Moldova to host the next EPC meeting in spring 2023, followed by Spain in autumn 2023 and the UK in early 2024. This pattern shows a desire to alternate meetings between EU and non-EU countries. The nomination of Spain indicates that EPC meetings are likely to be organised back-to-back with informal European Council meetings in the country holding the six-monthly EU Council presidency, which could result in a revival of its role in foreign policy. Furthermore, a number of open questions remain, particularly regarding the financing of the EPC, as outlined by [Josep Borrell](#).

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.

3. The informal meeting of the European Council

On 7 October 2022, EU Heads of State or Government met in Prague for an informal European Council meeting at which they discussed Ukraine and energy. No conclusions were adopted, although exceptionally a draft [statement](#) had been circulated ahead of the summit. Prior to the summit, President Michel held a [preparatory meeting](#) with President Macron, Chancellor Scholz, Petr Fiala and Ursula von der Leyen.

Main results of the informal meeting of the European Council

Ukraine

As [confirmed](#) by Charles Michel, EU leaders reiterated their financial, humanitarian, political and military support to Ukraine and strengthened sanctions to increase pressure on the Russian regime. They also considered the global implications of food shortages and confirmed their willingness to support partners under strain around the world. Similar to past meetings held since the start of Russia's war on Ukraine, President Zelensky [addressed](#) the European Council, stressing both the need to protect critical infrastructure and Ukraine's high expectations from the recovery conference being organised by the Commission and the [G7 Presidency](#) in Berlin on 25 October 2022.

Main message from the President of the European Parliament: Roberta Metsola [stressed](#) that only by providing Ukraine with 'advanced weaponry and military intelligence' can the war be stopped and real peace achieved. She stressed that aspiring countries must stay the course on EU membership.

Energy

As [highlighted](#) by President Michel after the meeting, EU leaders considered ways of addressing the energy challenge on three levels. First, measures to reduce energy consumption and demand. Second, the progressive setting-up of platforms for joint purchasing of energy at EU level, notably gas, to ensure security of supply. And third, they focused on the high energy prices and considered the steps laid out by Ursula von der Leyen in her [letter](#) of 5 October 2022, notably price caps, to tackle the situation. The European Commission is to present a more detailed proposal in the coming weeks. President von der Leyen confirmed that [Russian gas imports](#) had been cut from 41 % of total EU gas imports in February 2022 to 7.5 % currently and stressed that EU Member States' gas storage facilities were filled to 90 %, an increase of 15 % compared with one year ago.

Main message from the President of the European Parliament: President Metsola stressed that the Parliament 'has called for an EU bloc-wide gas price cap', called for the energy union to 'finally become a reality' and emphasised that the Parliament is a reliable partner that is able to act fast whenever needed.

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