

# Outcome of the meetings of EU leaders, 5-6 October 2023

EU leaders met on 5 and 6 October 2023 in Granada for an informal meeting of the European Council, preceded by a meeting of the European Political Community (EPC). On 5 October, leaders at the EPC issued messages of unity in support of Ukraine in the wake of Russia's war against it. On other topics, such as facilitating peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EPC made little headway.

At their informal meeting on 6 October, EU leaders adopted the Granada Declaration, taking stock of progress made in achieving the objectives set at Versailles in March 2022. This follow-up exercise was crucial, as EU leaders are starting a discussion process on two critical and intertwined topics: i) the future political priorities to underpin the 2024-2029 strategic agenda, and ii) the process of EU enlargement and its consequences for EU institutions and policies. Furthermore, EU leaders discussed migration, reference to which was excluded from the Granada Declaration on account of opposition from Poland and Hungary. The European Council President thus issued a declaration on migration in his own name for the second time in a row, with the support of the other 25 Member States.

## 1. The European Political Community meeting

On 5 October, the Spanish Presidency hosted the third meeting of the EPC – the constitutive meeting of which was held in [Prague](#) in October 2022, followed by a [highly symbolic](#) meeting in Moldova in June 2023. Originating in a proposal made by French President Emmanuel Macron, the EPC was [designed](#) as a forum to promote political dialogue and cooperation between EU and non-EU countries, while contributing to peace and security on the European continent. It brings together the heads of state or government of 47 countries, excluding Belarus and Russia, and the leaders of the EU institutions. The EPC has so far remained a largely informal platform, with no budget or secretariat to ensure continuity between meetings. The organisation of the summits has relied on the host countries, with little involvement on the part of the EU institutions.

### EPC meeting format

The summit began with a [plenary session](#) opened by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. The session was dominated by messages of unity in support of Ukraine – tragically intensified by news of a Russian [missile attack](#) on civilian areas in the north of the country. Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, [stressed](#) the need to defeat Russia on the battlefield to avoid a new frozen conflict, and reiterated the need to offer security guarantees to countries vulnerable to Russia.

In his address, Sánchez stressed the shared aspiration of EPC members to tackle common challenges, such as energy sovereignty, artificial intelligence, digitalisation and how to maintain the international rules-based order. These challenges were then discussed in three thematic clusters: i) digitalisation; ii) energy, environment and the green transition; and iii) multilateralism and geostrategy. Unlike in Moldova, the theme of enlargement did not feature in the plenary session.



## Outcome of the EPC meeting

The EPC meeting took place amid [growing criticism](#) of its loose format and unclear purpose. The final press conference, which was to outline results and hand over the preparation of the next EPC meeting to the United Kingdom (UK), was cancelled. Concrete outcomes indeed appear limited. Although stronger cooperation between EPC countries in the field of cybersecurity was one point agreed upon, as stressed by [Macron](#), the meeting failed to make any significant progress in resolving conflicts between participating countries. Hopes for mediation between Kosovo and Serbia were dashed, with Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani [refusing](#) to meet Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić unless sanctions were taken against Serbia after the recent [spike in violence](#) in northern Kosovo.

Likewise, the prospect of facilitating peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and addressing the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, was undermined by the [non-attendance](#) of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The issue was however raised in a meeting between European Council President Charles Michel, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Macron and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. They [expressed](#) unwavering support for the territorial integrity of Armenia, condemned Azerbaijan's military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh and called for the resumption of dialogue. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [announced](#) that the EU's humanitarian aid to Armenia would be doubled from €5 million to €10 million. European Parliament President Roberta Metsola met with Pashinyan and [invited him](#) to address the European Parliament's next plenary session.

## Migration

Although the Spanish Presidency had not put the issue of migration on the agenda – an issue that had featured on the [Moldova meeting](#) agenda – the topic was [mentioned](#) in Michel's speech as a challenge the EPC should address together, alongside its conflict resolution mission. Migration was discussed on the sidelines, notably at a meeting convened by UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, including Italy, the Netherlands, France, Albania and the European Commission. The participants [committed](#) to help one another tackle the challenges of irregular migration, fight smuggling, and develop comprehensive partnerships. The possibility of UK cooperation with the EU border agency Frontex was also discussed.

## 2. The informal meeting of the European Council

The informal European Council meeting began with an exchange with Metsola, who underlined that as a result of a series of crises, the EU's budget was now stretched to its limit. In the context of the on-going revision of the EU's multiannual financial framework, she [stressed](#) that to be able to address migration, support Ukraine, help Member States struck by natural disasters, and generate sustainable growth, the EU needed a budget that was 'fit for purpose'. This was the first EU leaders' meeting attended by [Evika Silina](#) as Prime Minister of Latvia.

### The future of the European Union: The 2024-2029 Strategic Agenda

As proposed by Michel, EU leaders started a reflection process on the EU's future priorities, the results of which would feed into the 2024-2029 strategic agenda to be adopted in June 2024. The discussion was [based](#) on general questions: 'what do we want to do together? How can we assure we will be able to act together? How should our common ambitions be financed?'

The topics that were [identified](#) for the discussion in Granada and the reflection process were: i) security, defence and cyber-resilience; ii) long-term competitiveness and the EU single market; iii) crisis-preparedness; iv) the green and digital transitions; v) multilateralism and global partnerships; vi) migration; and vii) enlargement and absorption capacity. The European Council President's idea is to have specific topics dealt with in smaller groups, with discussions then scheduled for the various regular European Council meetings. First drafts are expected to be put forward in spring 2024. However, not all Member States were enthusiastic about the small groups' approach, as some fear being excluded from parts of the debate.

Some EU institutions and Member States have begun offering input for the future strategic priorities and potential Treaty reform in the context of EU enlargement. The Spanish Presidency put forward its own paper, [Resilient EU2030](#). The Commission [contributed](#) to the future priority policy objectives by outlining ways to increase EU resilience, competitiveness and sustainability. A much-discussed Franco-German [reflection paper](#) on the future of the EU, suggesting an EU made up of four distinct tiers: i) the inner circle, ii) the EU, iii) associated members, and iv) the EPC, each with different competences and obligations, also contributed to the debate. The [proposals](#) resulting from the Conference on the Future of Europe, at which Member States, EU institutions and citizens together indicated political priorities for the future, provided another contribution.

## Granada Declaration

The objective of the [Granada Declaration](#) was to take stock of the progress made since the [Versailles Declaration](#), adopted in March 2022 under the French Presidency of the Council, and which focused on the areas of defence, energy, and supply chain resilience. In the [words](#) of Michel, 'Granada is the time to look back and critically assess progress in strengthening our European sovereignty, identifying our achievements as well as areas that still require our political action'.

The Granada Declaration calls on the EU to take action in the following areas:

- the EU's defence readiness and capabilities;
- the EU's resilience and global long-term competitiveness;
- reduction in vulnerabilities and improved crisis-preparedness;
- a more cohesive, innovation-driven, and interconnected single market;
- affordable energy, EU energy sovereignty and lower external dependencies;
- engagement with partners and protection of the rules-based international order;
- preparation for enlargement, both in future Member States and in the EU itself.

Until the last moment, it was unclear whether the Granada Declaration would obtain the support of all 27 Member State leaders needed for its adoption. In the end, Hungary and Poland only agreed on the declaration if all references to migration were deleted. While this position must be seen in the context of the upcoming Polish elections on 15 October 2023 and the national [referendum on migration](#) the same day, the difficulties in agreeing on the Granada Declaration indicate a crisis of unity in the European Council. For the second time in a row EU leaders could not agree on a common text owing to disagreements on migration (see EPRS Post-European Council Briefing, [June 2023](#)).

Since the European Council is responsible for 'defin[ing] the EU general political directions and priorities' (Article 15 of the Treaty on European Union), the difficulties encountered when drafting the Granada Declaration do not bode well for the discussion process on the next strategic agenda. The European Council is also responsible for defining 'the strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning within the area of freedom, security and justice' (Article 68 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), something EU leaders have not been able to agree on since 2019, mainly on account of differences over EU migration policy.

## Migration

This informal leaders' meeting also discussed European migration policy, notably its external dimension. Reporting on the discussions, both Michel and von der Leyen welcomed the Council's recent [agreement](#) on a negotiating mandate for the regulation on [crisis situations](#), a big step towards completing the European migration and asylum reform package. The agreement in the Council reached by qualified majority was however criticised by Poland and Hungary, which expressed their disagreement by again opposing the adoption of text on migration by EU leaders. Prior to the meeting, the Polish government [stated](#) that it would 'present a tough veto against illegal immigration at the European Council', while Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [stated](#) that there would be 'no compromise on migration. Not today, and not in the upcoming years'.

In the end, Michel issued a separate [declaration on migration](#) in his capacity as European Council President. The declaration summarises the EU's comprehensive approach to migration, which

combines: i) external action, notably mutually beneficial comprehensive partnerships with countries of origin and transit; ii) measures to address the root causes of migration; iii) opportunities for legal migration; iv) more effective protection of EU external borders; v) a resolute fight against organised crime, human trafficking and smuggling, and instrumentalisation of migration as a hybrid threat; vi) a higher rate of returns; and vii) internal aspects, in compliance with international law, EU principles and values, and the protection of fundamental rights. Michel stressed that migration would be on the [agenda](#) of the next formal European Council meeting on 26-27 October 2023.

*Main message of the President of the European Parliament:* Metsola [reported](#) on a detailed exchange with EU leaders on migration and stressed that for the first time in decades there was a realistic possibility of agreeing on a common European asylum and migration system. She criticised the lack of political will in the past to adopt ambitious legislation. Rather than making decisions supported by a majority of Member States, consensus had been sought, leading to a de facto veto in a policy area where the veto cannot be used. She stressed the public is very concerned about migration, having recently [stated](#) that 'migration is the challenge of our generation'.

## Enlargement

Michel [indicated](#) that discussions on enlargement had focused on 'the consequences this expansion may entail'. Member States' views are quite diverse on the matter, both on the question of internal reforms and regarding a possible date. While some, such as [Lithuania](#), would prefer a quick enlargement ahead of any potential institutional reforms, many others, including [Germany](#), acknowledge the need to carry out internal reforms first, this potentially even leading to Treaty reform, in order for an enlarged EU to be able to function.

Michel's [proposal](#) of setting 2030 as the possible date for enlargement has been met by [reservations](#) on the part of many Member States, including the [Netherlands](#), but also from the [European Commission](#). The Irish Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, [stressed](#) the need to be 'honest with people. From becoming a candidate to actually joining the EU takes many years'. Others, such as Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas [believe](#) that 2030 is 'too far away' for enlargement. The Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, even [shed doubt](#) on the added value for the EU of Ukrainian membership.

One idea suggested by various actors – [Member States](#) and [think-thanks](#) – is that of 'gradual integration', by which candidate countries would be offered visible and tangible benefits early on to motivate their reform process and reduce the waiting time for full membership. Consequently, they could potentially already participate in some policies and/or EU institutions (without voting rights) before formally acceding to the EU. Ursula von der Leyen has indicated that the Commission will publish its progress reports in early November. A decision on opening negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova could [potentially](#) be taken at the 14-15 December 2024 European Council meeting.

*Main message of the President of the European Parliament:* Metsola [described](#) enlargement as the Union's strongest geopolitical tool. The EU now needed to [discuss](#) its absorption capacity and internal reform, because 'what works for 27 will not work for 32, 33 or 35' EU Member States.

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