

Foreign Policy Association together with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung offer you a newsletter on foreign policy and European integration issues of the Republic of Moldova. The newsletter is part of the "Foreign Policy Dialogue" joint Project.

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# NEWSLETTER

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## Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Mădălin Necșuțu, editor-coordinator

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### News in Brief



On October 31<sup>st</sup>, the Commission for Emergency Situations adopted several decisions implementing international sanctions in the Republic of Moldova. It is about the sanctions imposed by the United States against several persons and entities involved in corruption actions, including the oligarchs Vlad Plahotniuc and Ilan Șor. Along with Ilan Șor and Vlad Plahotniuc, the list of sanctions imposed by the USA includes several citizens of the Russian Federation who acted to influence the elections in the Republic of Moldova and keep the country in the Russian sphere of influence. Among the Russian citizens subject to sanctions are Igor Ceaika, Iurii Gudilin, Olga Grak, Leonid Gonin, the latter acting as advisers to the former president of the Republic of Moldova, Igor Dodon. On October 26<sup>th</sup>, the US authorities announced that Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Șor, as well as the party led by the latter, together with a group of people from the Russian Federation, were included on the Magnitsky List.



The Chisinau authorities ordered that engineers of the National Army, together with representatives of other force structures, conduct investigations in the village of Naslavcea, Ocnița district, where on the morning of October 31<sup>st</sup>, a Russian missile fell, shot down by the Ukrainian anti-aircraft system. The Russian missile would have targeted the strategic infrastructure in Ukraine, specifically the Novodnistrovsk dam, reports Radio Free Europe. For security reasons, the Ocnița-Sokirani road border crossing point was partially closed. The Ukrainian authorities do not allow entry into Ukraine, due to the risks of air attacks, so crossing the border is allowed in one direction: exit from Ukraine and entry into the Republic of Moldova. The missile was shot down by the Ukrainian anti-aircraft system, according to the Moldovan Ministry of Interior.



President Maia Sandu declared in a speech held in the Romanian Parliament that the Republic of Moldova is going through an "unprecedented energy crisis" due to the war waged by Russia in Ukraine. "We are risking running out of gas and energy this winter. The gas tariff has increased six times and is double compared to Romania", said Maia Sandu in front of Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă and Romanian parliamentarians. She also stated that the gas tariff in the Republic of Moldova has increased six times and is double compared to Romania. "The situation regarding electricity is just as serious. After Russia bombed Ukrainian networks, Gazprom halved the volume of gas for Moldova, and the supply of electricity from the left bank of the Dniester for the next month became uncertain. Providing the country with electricity is a daily challenge," Maia Sandu also said.

## Republic of Moldova and the benefits of the European Political Community



The European leaders from 44 states met in Prague on October 6-7 at the first reunion of the "European Political Community" (EPC)

The designation of the Republic of Moldova as the host country for the second meeting of the European Political Community, a French initiative supported by the European Commission to get the European states more united, is a signal that cannot be overlooked. This defines the EU's desire to get closer to the European countries that now have the EU candidate country status for EU accession - Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

The European Political Community came into existence de facto on October 6<sup>th</sup>, in Prague, when the first meeting in this format took place in the premises of the Prague Castle. The 27 heads of state and government of the EU were joined by another 17 counterparts from states in the EU neighbourhood with which Brussels has strong relations.

The new format of the European Political Community encouraged

political dialogue and cooperation in order to strengthen the security, stability, and prosperity of the European continent. Also, participants from the 44 countries discussed common security and energy issues arising from Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, in a summit to which Russia did not have access.

The Prague meeting was the inaugural summit of the European Political Community. This format was launched by the

► French President Emmanuel Macron on May 9<sup>th</sup>, on the occasion of Europe Day, and received the support of the European Council at the summit in June.

The European leaders assured then that this community “will not replace the enlargement policy of the Union”. This fact also dispelled the initial fears of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, both countries aspiring at the EU integration on the classic and already established basis.

On the occasion of the Prague summit, French President Emmanuel Macron stated that the new European Political

Community sends a message of “unity” at a time when Europe is shaken by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

For his part, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that the leaders of the European Political Community know that Russia’s attack on Ukraine is a brutal violation of the order of peace and security in Europe.

Therefore, the role of the European Political Community is to produce greater cohesion not only within the EU, but to provide a broader and closer cooperation framework with the neighbours of the EU club of countries. All these actions

converge, especially for aspiring countries like Moldova, in a faster process of European integration and interconnection, especially from an economic point of view.

It is now only up to the Republic of Moldova to do its homework on reforms, quickly diversify its sources of energy supply and get rid of dependence on Russia, and last but not least to maintain the security of the state internally where the oligarchic forces loyal to Moscow are working hard to oust the pro-European government in Chisinau.

**Madalin Necsutu**

## Without obstacles and in absence of political crisis, this EU accession process could take about 7-8 years

**The expert and researcher of the New Europe Center in Kyiv, Ukraine, Leonid Litra, explained for the foreign policy bulletin of the FES/APE about the benefits that the new European Political Community, proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron, offers to countries aspiring to join the EU and not only. The expert explained the course of Moldova and Ukraine on the European path, offering a temporal perspective of what this process represents. Read in the following interview the most important ideas discussed with the Moldovan expert from Kyiv:**

■ How do you see the project of the European Political Community proposed by the French leader Emmanuel Macron and supported by the European Commission? What would be the benefits for Kyiv and how does Ukraine relate to this project?

■ Kiev sees it as a format not related to Ukraine’s EU accession, but rather as a discussion forum to have better coordination of EU countries and those that share, though differently, the idea of having good relations with European countries.



That is why we have, in addition to the EU member states, 17 other countries that would like to better coordinate what is happening in Europe. We are in a time of a big war. More coordination is needed. Not only on the war, but also on energy security, on the issue of refugees as a result of the war. However, we also have the pandemic crisis generated by the COVID-19 and other crises that we are going through at the moment

■ How do you see the format of this discussion?

■ I believe that President Macron’s initiative comes precisely to fill this void of communication on multiple crises. I don’t think this initiative will include Russia in the future.

On the other hand, I think it was necessary to have a wider format, because all these crises do not only affect the 27 Member States. Moldova is equally entitled to participate in these discussions, as it is directly affected.

## Coordination in the face of crises

■ Is this format perhaps seen as a waiting room to the EU or as a community referring to a closer cooperation in such areas as economy, energy, and security?

■ Rather the second option, because in this format we also find countries that have no ambitions and aspirations to become EU members. I don't see the point of them participating if this format was seen as an antechamber. I think that many countries aspiring to become members of the EU would not have accepted such a state. I am referring here especially to Ukraine, Moldova and the states of the Western Balkans. That would have meant accepting a lower position than what they aspire to.

Initially there were vague formulations with regard to this project and such options were also examined, but after the conclusions of the first meeting in Prague in this format [October 6-7] we see that it is a platform for discussions at the highest level to make these countries to better coordinate in order to deal with crises.

## Concrete reforms and future steps

■ Are you optimistic about the EU accession processes, both for Ukraine and Moldova? Are there prerequisites for next year for the two countries to take the next step - the opening of negotiations on accession chapters with the EU?

■ There are some preconditions for this to happen. If these preconditions are met, without delay, then there is a chance for us to have a political condition at the end of next year for these negotiations to begin.

As we know, at this moment we have the most important task to fulfil, namely the nine recommendations made to Chisinau and the seven recommendations made by the European Commission to the authorities in Kyiv. Our countries must show that they can meet these challenges.

After that follows the evaluation of the European Commission in October 2023. This already means that both Moldova and Ukraine will be part of the EU enlargement logic and if next year the EC evaluation shows that there is progress in these chapters, I am referring in particular to the fundamental ones like 23 and 24 [of the 35 chapters] dealing with the rule of law, the fight against corruption, public procurement, etc.

You may remember that after Croatia joined the EU in 2013, the accession methodology was reformed for acceding countries - more recently Moldova and Ukraine - and now there is a methodology that has six pillars. Thus, one of these pillars is precisely these articles 23 and 24 that I was talking about. This means that it will be much harder to negotiate, open and then close chapters than in the past, as it was in the accession waves of Romania and Bulgaria (2007) and then Croatia (2013).

This means that if a country wants to make progress on closing and opening negotiation chapters, they must make steady progress on chapters 23 and 24. The whole accession process is linked to success in reforming the judiciary in the fight against corruption.

■ I would like to ask you what the EC recommendations for Ukraine are, since you mentioned there are seven of them.

■ As in the case of Moldova, also for Ukraine they are focused on justice, on the rule of law which represents the basis of compatibility between the EU members and the states aspiring to become members of the EU. Especially since there exist problems in the EU related to countries that have joined and that do not respect the basic rules, namely the rule of law and have problems with the fight against corruption.

If Moldova and Ukraine fulfil these recommendations, move in the right direction and there is a positive evaluation by the EU, in December 2023, at the

European Council, a decision can be made by which the two countries can open discussions on the start of negotiations. Then the consultations take some time.

To open consultations you need something called an intergovernmental consultation. After this, a screening (verification) process takes place. It also lasts about a year and a half. Then we receive the evaluation indicators (benchmarks). I would say that according to this methodology, taking into account a process that proceeds without any obstacle or political crisis, this process could last about 7-8 years. I repeat, without any impediment.

■ Do you think there will be that much patience?

■ For this, there is need for a political situation without consequences in these candidate countries. Even if the current governments change, they should be equally committed to this process. The charm of this process is that there must be consensus on the end goal. In the Republic of Moldova, we must admit that there are forces that challenge this final goal.

Personally, from a political point of view, I think this is the biggest risk. This government still has about three years until 2025 for us to open negotiations. For example, the case of Turkey is the most unfortunate. Likewise, Montenegro opened the negotiations in 2012 and today, 10 years later, it has closed only three chapters out of 35.

Today, this process is seen as not exactly meritocratic. Even in chapters that could be closed and opened in countries like Serbia, Albania or Montenegro, but that requires the consensus of all 27 states. And that doesn't always happen. Because there are states that have a separate agenda, that's why apart from the fact that we have to be prepared, we have to make sure that all 27 states are on the same wavelength.

■ Thank you!



## Editorial

# The European Political Community - a door to the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the EU?

Editorial by Simion Ciochina

**T**he war in Ukraine and the increased aggression of the Russian Federation has convinced the EU leaders to accelerate the expansion of cooperative relations with the countries of its neighbourhood. At least that's one of the arguments presented by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, when he announced in May the intention to create the European Political Community (EPC). It took only a few months to put the idea into action, so at the beginning of October, in Prague, the first meeting and establishment of the EPC took place. The event was attended by 44 leaders of the continent, including 17 countries from the immediate or more distant neighbourhood of the EU: from Armenia to Turkey, from the Balkan states to the EU candidate states.

The purpose of the meeting was an attempt to form a wider circle of friendly states, in the context of the war in Ukraine, which would be co-opted to ensure common security and cooperation of EU countries and beyond, in terms of sanctions against Russia and energy policy.

Even though there was criticism brought to the establishment of the EPC, such as that "the new format would be the threshold level for the nations that fail to join the EU or that there are already other pan-European institutions such as the Council of



Europe (as Nikols Busse writes in an editorial for Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), however the meeting in Prague once again demonstrated the desire of both EU and neighbouring countries to join forces to oppose Moscow's increasing aggression.

Also important was the announcement made by President Maia Sandu, who in her speech in Prague said that the next meeting of the European Political Community will take place next spring, in Chisinau. What does this mean for the European course and future of the Republic of Moldova and what could the new meeting bring both for EU leaders and representatives, as well as for Moldova and non-EU countries? Will the new project really be viable or will it turn into a bubble, full of diplomatic language and empty promises? Or will

this EPC still be an ambitious, forward-looking project with tangible results for all?

### **Moldova should be more vocal**

The first EPC Prague Summit was certainly full of diplomatic rather than pragmatic statements, but it was also a new opportunity for the EU and non-EU leaders to meet and discuss the most pressing issues.

"At a time when Europe's stability and security are threatened, we need more dialogue, more mutual understanding. And this is what we managed to achieve at the first meeting of the European Political Community", said Charles Michel, President of the European Council.

For her part, President Maia Sandu said that Moldova, an eastern neighbour and more recently a candidate country for the EU membership, is happy to host the next EPC summit in Chisinau in spring. "Making Europe stronger and more resilient is a long-term effort," Sandu pointed out. At the same time, the president mentioned that European countries "can reach peace only together" and that they are "united" in support of Ukraine and its territorial integrity.

Thus, no matter how things turn out, next spring's meeting must surely be one less full of protocol pictures and formal discussions, but one that comes up with both concrete projects and facts. On the one hand, the EU leaders could come up with some concrete initiatives, such as, why not, even announcing the fact that the Republic of Moldova and/or Ukraine is the country that will become the next member of the EU from date and month X. On the other hand, the Republic of Moldova must use the opportunities and be more vocal, more courageous, to demand and even obtain from the EU new feasible projects. Chisinau should present a clear vision, with exact plans and prove to everyone that it knows what it wants and that the desire to become a member of the EU is not just an electoral promise, but a reality.

### **Better energy and military security**

What will be the end of the war in Ukraine is difficult to predict, and until the start of the new summit in the spring of 2023, the EU and Chisinau should work on concrete plans and projects related to the historical vulnerabilities of the Republic of Moldova, such as the country's energy and military security. The latest events

prove that it is hard to believe that the regime in Moscow will be peaceful and that Putin can use any weapon against Europe. One of these is energy, and the Republic of Moldova, which is historically dependent on energy resources from the Russian Federation, is and will be a sure victim.

At the Prague summit, Maia Sandu mentioned this issue, stating that: "Energy security and accessibility of energy resources was another important topic we addressed at the meeting. It is certain that we cannot allow the energy crisis to endanger our democracy". Thus, it is essential and vital that at the next EPC meeting some energy projects are announced or even launched, which would free Chisinau from the Russian energy dependence.

Another problem that should make the authorities of the Republic of Moldova think about is the security of the country's airspace. The flagrant violation of the airspace by three Russian missiles in October of this year demonstrated how fragile the security and neutrality of the Republic of Moldova is. More than that, the budget of the national army is one of the smallest in Europe, being, until the war in Ukraine, estimated at MDL 1.32 billion, which constituted 0.38 percent of the GDP.

Thus, even if the authorities in Chisinau continue to state Moldova is a neutral country, at the next summit I believe that new support programmes should be announced to ensure the security of the state. As a country that cannot secure a military budget, the Republic of Moldova should ask for help from all European leaders. One of these programmes could target the provision of anti-aircraft systems, which are very expensive, but which can assure the

Moldovan citizens that in the event of a Russian attack, the Republic of Moldova will be able to defend itself.

### **A success or a dead project**

The summit of the European Political Community to be held in the spring of 2023 will be a crucial one, which will demonstrate whether or not this format deserves to stay alive. If Macron and the EU do not understand that such meetings should not remain formal, the project will die before being born. In turn, the organization of such an event puts a lot of pressure on the Chisinau authorities, who have to prepare, both logistically and conceptually, the next meeting.

The fact that more than 40 foreign delegations will come to Chisinau will put a lot of pressure on the infrastructure, because the Republic of Moldova does not have sufficient hotels for high-level leaders or conference venues. In addition, as I mentioned before, Chisinau should be more vocal and insist, like Ukraine, on more consistent support from Europe in solving at least two pressing problems that the country has.

The future Summit should be focused on the security of Europe and prompt responses to any type of aggression, because only in this way can it be demonstrated that Europe can be united, and countries with low risk and potential can always count on the support of developed countries. Only in this way the aggressors who violate any laws of humanity will be able to understand that they have no chance to attack or terrorize the states, which they, for various reasons, consider them part of "their world".

# The real stake for Moldova is to settle on a European direction from which we can say that it is a path of no return

**T**he Vice President of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, Dan Barna, gave an interview to the foreign policy bulletin in which he spoke about what the European Political Community means for the Republic of Moldova, and especially how he sees Moldova's relationship with the EU. Mr Barna also explained his vision about the bilateral relationship between Chisinau and Bucharest and how it can help Romania to get out of the energy dependence on Russia. We invite you to read the full interview below:

■ **What does the connection to the European Political Community mean for the Republic of Moldova?**

■ I would not like to go into too many details about President Macron's plan, because the discussion is somewhat at an early stage, and from the point of view of EU's acceptance, the Republic of Moldova is in the front line. The fact that the accession negotiations have opened, in the context of the war in Ukraine, can be seen as an opportunity. And here we are talking about two levels.

On the one hand, we are talking about the pressure that Romania should put on Brussels and the European institutions so that this decision for Moldova remains active, but equally the government



in Chisinau must speed up as much as humanly possible and check off those requirements in the accession plan precisely to keep the discussion in the political area, where things are at the moment.

We currently have a dictatorial Russia that, by attacking Ukraine, is putting pressure on everything the EU stands for. In this context, if the Republic of Moldova manages to solve the accession requirements that target real problems, and the discussion remains in the political area regarding a future accession, things will go a little better.

Otherwise, we could have a situation similar to that of Romania

regarding the accession to the Schengen area, where the technical criteria are met, but we have some problems related to the justice area and the perception of credibility.

Likewise, the Republic of Moldova should be as prepared as possible with everything that depends on it. This would be the message I would like to convey in Chisinau, namely that the Government should focus in the next period on fulfilling the requirements from the EU accession roadmap.

■ **How do you assess the progress made by the Republic of Moldova and in which areas should reforms be accelerated in Chisinau?**

■ I have noticed that some appointments have been made in the anti-corruption area that open up some optimistic perspectives on the problems that Moldova is facing regarding justice, a reality that we know and we should not hide behind our fingers. We will see in the coming months and years if things change for the better.

This mandate of President Maia Sandu is historic, but also critical for the future of the Republic of Moldova. Because, to the extent that these reform steps accepted by the majority of the electorate supporting Maia Sandu will succeed, the European option could become a consistent one in the long term.

Moldova has always had this perspective of swinging from one side to the other, depending on the options of a more pro-Russian or more pro-European president. From my point of view, the real stake is for Moldova to settle on a European direction from which we can say that it is a path of no return. I would not like to use the word irreversible, because, unfortunately, we thought peace was irreversible in Europe and we see what is happening now in Ukraine and what Putin is doing there.

■ **Are you optimistic that the Republic of Moldova will meet these requirements and accede to the next step towards the EU – the opening of the negotiation chapters with Brussels?**

■ I am an optimist. Otherwise I would have left politics, being an entrepreneur who undertook to

get involved in political life. If the Government in Chisinau manages to do the things that depend on it, I think it is a window of real opportunity for Moldova to get closer to the EU and open the negotiation chapters. It largely depends on the Republic of Moldova, but it also depends on the general context.

As things stand now, this window of opportunity is real and must be speculated in the good sense of this word.

■ **What do you think about greater interconnection of the Republic of Moldova with Romania and the EU? How do you see this perspective?**

■ They say it takes two partners to dance a tango. We, from the Union Save Romania Party (USR), are pressing from Bucharest for Romania to support Moldova and to get more involved. Recently, at a conference I attended in Chisinau, I also heard voices on the sidelines of the conference of some experts who said that, unfortunately, Moldovan graduates of faculties in Romania or other EU countries find it very difficult to find a place in various state institutions of the Republic of Moldova.

We have also been presented with four or five procurement cases where the supplier from Romania was eliminated at the expense of competitors from Belarus, India or other countries. What I mean is that such elements give a dissonant message. This message is heard, and those who are not necessarily fervent supporters of the European

path that we all want for the Republic of Moldova obviously use these examples.

When you have economic actors from Romania who are removed from tenders under various pretexts, the message is not one of collaboration. Yes, Moldova must assume this collaboration with Romania and its commitments towards the EU.

As for Romania, there are real support resources in Bucharest to the extent that there would also be a more visible opening from Chisinau.

■ **Would Romania have the capacity to replace Russia in the energy sector and do it in such a way that the Republic of Moldova is no longer 100% dependent on this country? We know very well how Gazprom uses the “energy weapon” to achieve its political goals.**

■ For Moldova, as for most European states, finding alternative suppliers is definitely a medium-term priority. Thus, Russian blackmail will continue to exist. I don't know if Romania can completely replace Russia. I saw some figures showing that Romania can cover the gas needs of the Republic of Moldova for the winter period. This would mean about 6 percent of what Romania consumes in terms of natural gas.

So this would be in Romania's power and I hope that the current government in Bucharest will support the Republic of Moldova in this direction.

■ **Thank you!**



## Expert opinion

# Realising Europe's geopolitical vocation

**Nicoletta Pirozzi**

**Nicoletta Pirozzi is head of the EU programme and institutional-relations manager at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), specialising in EU politics and institutions, Italian foreign policy and international security. She is president of MondoDem, a progressive foreign-policy network, and a founding member of ProgressiveActs. Can the European Political Community be the backbone of a new European security architecture? Nicoletta Pirozzi asks.**

### **The EPC can be more than a photo-opportunity for men in suits (Council of the EU)**

With the return of war on the European territory, the European Union has [rediscovered](#) its geopolitical ambitions and capabilities. And yet how to rebuild a postwar European security architecture remains a dilemma. In the last year, many of the basic assumptions underlying the EU's global vision and action have been shaken.

The union has learnt that—from economy to energy to defence—strategic dependence does expose it to adverse circumstances and can ultimately jeopardise European integration. The EU's world [constricted](#) as Russia became a systemic enemy, China reinforced its status as an economic competitor and countries in the global south became increasingly vocal in their criticisms of the EU model.

Now more than ever, the EU's route to a credible international role resides in its neighbourhood. If it wants to accomplish its global ambitions, it has to learn how to play the role of a regional political actor.

That is not easy. The EU is not an island and there is no ocean separating it from some of the most troubled areas in the

world—from the Balkans to the eastern neighbourhood, from the middle east to Africa. Moreover, its relationship with the neighbourhood countries has been [going through](#) a profound and difficult evolution.

The perspective of membership, which represented a powerful foreign-policy instrument at the beginning of the century, is unattractive (United Kingdom), [poisoned](#) (western Balkans, Turkey), excluded (northern Africa) or [too remote](#) (Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia). Over time, the EU has developed various schemes to keep these countries engaged and connected but with little success. In fact, the EU is losing its grip on the European sphere, and this leaves a political vacuum which is rapidly being filled by other actors, while fuelling conflicts and crisis.

### **Display of cohesion**

There is thus room and requirement for a new, strong political initiative for a comeback of the EU as a regional power. Can the new [European Political Community](#) (EPC) represent such an ambitious project? It is difficult to tell from its first manifestation in Prague on October 6th. Forty-four countries, 27 EU member states and 17 partners, including the UK and Turkey, gathered



the day before the informal summit convened by the Czech rotating presidency of the EU Council.

It was a big photo-opportunity and a significant display of cohesion of the European family in the face of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. There were discussions on two issues of the day: energy and security/stability. There was even a limited but tangible result, facilitated by the French president, Emmanuel Macron. A civilian EU mission is to be sent to the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan to facilitate a normalisation of their conflictual relationship, shaken by the reverberations of Russia's violent focus on Ukraine. Finally, there was a promise to reconvene in six month time in Moldova, and again after six months in the UK.

In some respects, this is a surprising result. The idea has taken off at incredible speed, by European standards, since it was [launched](#) by Macron on Europe Day (May 9th). The European



institutions and some European leaders, including the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, endorsed and relaunched the initiative subsequently.

For sure, the escalating war in Ukraine and the subsequent offer to Ukraine, and Moldova, of candidacy status—together with the need to give answers to European citizens who [expressed](#) their preferences for the continent at the Conference on the Future of Europe—were crucial accelerators. And the evolution of the political and economic situation in post-Brexit UK helped in convincing the new premier, Liz Truss, to be present at the European family gathering.

The promoters of the project had to clarify some key aspects and make some changes to the plan to make it appealing to key partners. The EPC is not to be a substitute for enlargement, as feared by some of the western-Balkan countries and eastern partners. Nor will it be institutionalised, as this would have prevented the UK in particular from participating. And there is to be no overlap with other pan-European organisations, particularly the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe.

All this enabled the inclusive format of 44 in Prague. These clarifications will not however be enough to turn the EPC into an effective and sustainable initiative which can represent the backbone of Europe's geopolitical future. Only if we clarify its objectives will it be possible to adapt the format and membership—not the other way round.

## Two visions

There are two main visions for the EPC. One is to create a political space to keep the EU's neighbours anchored to it. Then the lack of institutionalisation can be a problem. If the EU wants to be in the driving seat and avoid the nationalisation of the project, the institutions in Brussels should play a key role in setting the agenda and ensuring its follow-up.

Moreover, only access to EU institutions with a decision-shaping role can offer partner countries added value. Some proposals have already been advanced—pre-EU summit gatherings enlarged to include partners and a parliamentary forum drawn from the European Parliament and the parliaments of partner countries. In this scenario, the criterion for entering the EPC should be commitment to EU fundamental values, including respect for democracy, human rights and rule of law.

A different idea would be to use the EPC to rally the European family against Russia, in an attempt to address urgent issues and longer-term security concerns. Interests more than shared values and rules would then provide a common platform. The informal intergovernmental setting chosen in Prague would be ideal, as it allows the format to be flexible and the membership large. Yet if this serves very well the urgency of the day, it is less convincing as a recipe for subsequent phases. It is difficult to see how the EPC could then evolve from an initial exchange of notes on Ukraine into something meaningful for the future of Europe.

At the moment there is thus no single, clear, long-term perspective, and it will be a challenge to ensure a convergence of interests among 44 states and adequate follow-up without a formal structure. Whether it is wise for the EU to sponsor an initiative in the European continent which it cannot control—since it advocates participation of all states on equal footing and excludes a role for the EU caucus—is also questionable.

A third way can however be explored, where the intergovernmental setting of the EPC serves as a political forum to discuss the main foreign- and security-policy issues between the EU and partner countries, connected to the agenda of EU summits. This could start with visible, concrete projects which can be advanced and implemented by differentiated groups of members with the support of the EU institutions.

A starting-point could be a Next Generation Ukraine package, to support Ukrainian resilience and future reconstruction. This would keep the EU in the driving seat, while ensuring the format was sustainable and the membership inclusive—even if some partners might fall away.

The most important task of the moment for the EU is to develop a [clear vision](#) of what is at stake for it and what it is for. Without clear direction, even the ostensibly smartest political inventions can backfire.

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