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Key Expectations and Deliverables of the Upcoming EPC Summit in Moldova

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The European Political Community, which was launched in 2022, is a high-level platform for political dialogue that brings together leaders of European nations to address common challenges and promote solidarity in the pan-European space. The EPC does not replace any existing organisation, structure or process, but rather serves as a venue for high-level exchanges in an informal setting. The first EPC Summit in Prague focused largely on two issues: peace and security, especially in relation to Russia's war in Ukraine, and the energy crisis. The second Summit will be held on 1 June 2023 in Moldova, an EU candidate country and neighbour of Ukraine, which is resisting Russia's brutal invasion. Building on the results of the Prague meeting, the upcoming Summit will seek to focus on peace and security, the resilience of democracies, connectivity and energy security.

The idea of a European Political Community (EPC) was proposed by President of France Emmanuel Macron, symbolically in Strasbourg on 9 May 2022, at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Macron's proposal was framed within the "new geopolitical context" brought about by Russia's war in Ukraine, stalled EU enlargement in the Balkans and the emergence of new candidate countries. He also drew parallels with the European Confederation proposal set out by one of his predecessors, François Mitterrand, in 1989. In doing so, Macron attempted to provide a new answer to the crucial question: How can Europe be organised politically with a broader scope than the European Union? Macron was therefore trying to revive previous notions of a two-tier or multi-speed Europe. In a nutshell, Macron's vision of the EPC was two-fold: supporting pre-accession countries with economic benefits and stronger EU ties, while aiming to involve the United Kingdom and other non-accession European states in security issues.

The EPC also goes back to the roots of the concept of a "Wider Europe", as the majority of the participating states have varying degrees of integration and cohesion with the EU27.

The EU's role in shaping, framing and supporting initiatives within the EPC format is key. However, the EPC is clearly not an alternative to EU enlargement, but rather a venue for helping to revive a European project based on common values and joint interests in ensuring security and prosperity on the European continent. It should also help the transitions of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, when ready, from the EU's Eastern Partnership to the revised enlargement policy. EU accession is a long process but the 2014 Association Agreements with the EU and Moldova's participation in south-east European formats (SEECP, RCC, CEFTA) since the early 2000s already provide solid ground in terms of EU approximation, association and economic integration. Thus, the EPC provides a reinforced platform to help Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia along their membership path, enact democratic and economic reforms, and achieve intermediate integration milestones, such as accession to the EU's single market. The EPC's priorities should be strengthening democracy and the rule of law, promoting sustainable development and addressing the challenges that threaten them.

For a post-Brexit UK and for Türkiye, which has stalled its EU accession process, the EPC provides new opportunities to engage in strategic dialogues and enhanced cooperation with the EU and other European countries, in particular on security-, energy- and trade-related topics. Overall, the EPC has the potential to foster a more inclusive and interconnected Europe, where the UK and Turkey can play vital roles in shaping its future direction.

It is also worth noting that the EPC is a platform not just for cooperation between European nations, but also for engagement with other international partners. Thus, representatives from the United States, Canada and Japan could be invited to future EPC Summits to discuss and address the global challenges facing Europe today. The EPC could be a useful forum for such cooperation and help to strengthen Europe's position in the world.

Looking at the format of the Prague Summit, the EPC works quite well as a venue for high-level exchanges in a fairly informal setting. Indeed, the EPC avoids repeating the experience of or duplicating existing formats such as the Council of Europe or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). European democracies and democratic values are at the heart of the EPC. The EPC should therefore develop cooperative relationships with the Council of Europe on matters of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. On the other hand, as foreign and security policy is becoming a key area, the EPC should also be a setting for addressing collective security and stability, which the OSCE cannot currently provide, being paralysed by Russia.

One of the challenges the EPC faces is Russia's actions and how to address them. Russia's war in Ukraine poses a significant threat to the stability and security of Europe, and it will be essential to address this issue at the upcoming EPC Summit. The Summit brings together European nations to tackle common challenges and promote cooperation and solidarity. The issue of accountability for violations of the international order is therefore crucial. The EPC should continue its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and provide assistance to Moldova to strengthen its internal resilience, as the country most affected by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Building on the results of the EPC Prague Summit, the upcoming meeting in Moldova should examine several initiatives for promoting connectivity in critical areas, such as energy interconnectivity, widening people-to-people contacts by expanding the Erasmus+ programme, liberalising roaming charges and improving the long-term future of Solidarity Lanes. These initiatives could help to further bridge existing gaps between EU and non-EU

countries, and to promote cross-border cooperation and information exchange to create a more interconnected Europe that enhances solidarity among European states. The issue of a multilateral political risk insurance mechanism for investments and infrastructure projects should also be part of the discussion in the EPC format. This would encourage partnerships with private sector companies, between governments, with International Financial Institutions and with non-governmental organisations.

Furthermore, the EPC Summit can play a key role in addressing the energy crisis that Europe currently faces. The discussions held in Prague showed that energy security is a major concern for European leaders and the EPC can provide a platform for cooperation and coordination in this area. In particular, the EPC can help to ensure that Europe has a diverse and secure energy supply, which is crucial for both economic and national security reasons. This could involve initiatives to support the development of renewable energy sources, as well as measures to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian energy imports.

The EPC Summit in Moldova presents a unique opportunity for EU member states and non-EU members alike to come together to strengthen their cooperation on common goals and interests. Reconstruction in Ukraine should be an implicit topic on the agenda as concrete infrastructure and connectivity projects are to be discussed.

While planning future connectivity, infrastructure and reconstruction projects, specific deliverables that will benefit people should be the primary focus of the upcoming Summit. To achieve this, the EU must play a pivotal role in shaping and supporting EPC initiatives. This role will be critical for fostering greater cooperation and integration across the continent.

The non-exhaustive list of policy recommendations set out below to be considered for the next EPC Summit could help to revive a European project based on common values and joint interests, promote cross-border cooperation and strengthen Europe's ability to respond to crises such as security incidents or natural disasters.

Policy Recommendations

- *Bridging Gaps across Europe*: The EPC states should focus on building connectivity and bridging gaps between the western, eastern, northern and southern EPC states, and between EU member states and non-EU countries, and promote cooperation in critical areas. The EU should build on and expand existing regional cooperation and development initiatives such as Three Seas.
- *Increasing Energy Connectivity*: The EPC should explore ways to increase energy connectivity across Europe to increase energy security and achieve green energy targets. This might include expanding the Energy Community Treaty to EPC states, speeding up natural gas and electricity interconnection, and developing a European "Super Grid" using the EU's Connecting Europe Facility.
- *Expanding the Solidarity Lanes*: Improving the long-term future of the Solidarity Lanes will be critical to facilitating supply routes to and from Ukraine. This could include upgrading and maintaining key routes, further expanding the trans-European transport networks to Ukraine and Moldova, and simplifying and harmonising customs procedures. One particular aspect that could require more attention is the southern corridor and its impact on connectivity, including Moldova's role in it.

- *New youth and workers' mobility schemes:* The EPC states should look at enhancing people-to-people contact and mobility across Europe. The EU has already developed a series of programmes to pursue these objectives in the EU and associated states. The EU could further expand these initiatives to non-EU members to foster improved cooperation and integration across Europe. The EPC Summit should discuss expanding the scope of Erasmus+. Moreover, the EU should consider opening new mobility programmes for public sector workers to create valuable opportunities for young professionals and public sector workers to gain experience and knowledge, and promote cross-border cooperation and information exchange.



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