

The European Political Community: What's Up?

Herman Matthijs
Universiteit Gent

ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of October 2022 the European continent has a new institution: "The European Political Community" (EPC). It's a meeting of 44 European countries and the leading institutions of the European Union (EU). This article overviews the history and the realisation of the EPC. Also the memberships and the aims are a part of this study concerning the most recent European institution.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the "European Political Community". Based at this first commentaries and the press releases of the presidency of the EU council.

This article pursues the following lines of inquiry:

- What are the reasons for the realisation of the EPC ?,
- Who are the members and why?,
- What's up with the EPC in coming periods?

HISTORY

Already in the year 1952 an "European Political Community" was proposed and this together with the already (1951) existed "European Coal and Steel Community" (ECSC) and the "European Defence Community" (EDC). This EPC à la the proposed treaty of 1952 and approved by the "ECSC" Assembly (the distant predecessor of the present European Parliament) contained the following novelties for the six members (the three Benelux countries, France, Italy and West-Germany) at that time: a directly elected assembly, a Senate appointed by the parliaments of the six members and a supranational executive-government accountable to the two parts of the EPC parliament.

But in 1954 the French parliament voted against the "EDC" and it was far from sure if other national parliaments should vote in favour (f.e. the Dutch parliament) for this "EPC" treaty, edition 1952. That was also the end of the idea of an "EPC" in the post- world war II years in Western Europe.

The EU Council meeting in June 2022 agreed to launch the "European Political Community" with the aim of bringing together as many of countries on the European continent in relation with the Russian war against Ukraine. The original idea came from the French President Macron in May 2022. During the six first months of the year 2022 the French republic was the president of the European Council (second part 2022: Czech republic, first period 2023: Sweden). (EU Council, 2022/1).

Macron said, in a speech before the European Parliament on 9 May 2022, that his idea of the creation of the EPC would be a new European institution to provide a space of democratic European nations with shared core values. The President of the French republic proposed areas for cooperation in the political field, security cooperation, energy and the free movement of people (House of Commons, 2022). The Macron proposal came in response of the recent applications for EU membership from Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine. The left liberal President Macron referred to the idea of the socialist President Mitterrand in 1989 for a European confederation (Notre Europe, 2022).

AIMS

The EU Council Concilium press release (2022/2) says that the “EPC” aims to:

- Foster political dialogue and cooperation to address issues of common interest;
- Strengthen the security, stability and prosperity of the European continent;
- Particular more cooperation in regard of the European energy crises.

The permanent presidency of the EU council, Charles Michel, underlines in his communiqué that the “EPC” does not replace any existing organisation, structure or process, nor does it aim to create a new one at this stage. The EU informal Council of 7 October 2022 at Prague says that the ambition of the “EPC” is: “to bring leaders together on the European continent and to foster their cooperation on issues of common interest, revolving around peace and security, the economic situation, energy and climate, migration and mobility.” (EU Council, 2022/3).

INVITATION

After the proposal of President Macron and the approval by the EU Council it was the duty of the permanent presidency of the EU council to post the invitations for the following list of countries and institutions, namely:

- The 27 members of the European Union (EU): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak republic, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden;
- The four EFTA (European Free Trade Agreement) states: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and the Swiss confederation;
- The presidency of the EU Commission and the permanent presidency of the EU Council;
- The Balkan states which are at present not an EU member: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Concerning Kosovo the EU Council presidency says: “This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with the ‘United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/1999 and the ‘International Court of Justice’ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence (EU Council, 2022/2);
- The south-eastern states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldavia, Turkey and Ukraine;
- The former EU member : the United Kingdom.

That means that 44 countries were invited and also the presidencies of the EU Council and the Commission or 46 delegations. Remarkable is that the mini-states (Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City) didn’t get an invitation. But Liechtenstein, as an EFTA member, was at the table in Prague.

Not invited were the two states in war: the Russian Federation and partner Belarus. In the weeks and months before the creation of the "EPC" three far east countries: Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine demanded the Eu membership.

All the 31 members (27 European Union and 4 EFTA) of the "European Economic Area" (E.E.A.) are invited to this new organisation. Due to the fact that governments are invited, the "European Political Community" is an intergovernmental organisation with as establishment date and place: 6 October 2022 at Prague. This first "EPC" meeting was also an opportunity to bring together the governments of America and Azerbaijan, two countries in war. Concerning this situation the "EPC" meeting resulted in the fact that Armenia agreed to facilitate a civilian EU mission alongside the border with Azerbaijan. This last country and friend of Turkey agreed to cooperate with this mission (EU Council, 2022/2).

All the European members of the NATO (23 in the EU, including Finland and Sweden), Norway, Iceland, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia are "EPC" members or 30 of the 32 NATO states (excluded: Canada and the USA) with the creation of the "EPC" the United Kingdom is back at the European table.

Liz Truss said in June 2022, then foreign Minister, that her country didn't support the proposal of President Macron.

Mrs. Truss emphasised that the United Kingdom sees the NATO as the key for the European security and the "G7" (members: USA, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and the EU Council/Commission) as the key economic alliance (House of Commons, 2022).

But in September 2022, as new Prime Minister Truss announced that she would be attending. The UK proposed the changing of the name: "EP Community" in "EP Forum" in order to remove possible connotations with the European Communities, the forerunner of the EU. The United Kingdom wanted also a limited role of the EU institutions inside the "EPC", knowing that the UK recently left the Union. At present it's unknown how the new British Prime Minister, after the resignation of PM Ms. Truss, will react in regard of this EPC idea ?

In this group of "EPC" members, there are countries (f.e. Serbia and Turkey) which haven't taken sanctions to the Russian federation for the Ukraine military invasion. After the first "European Political Community" the participants decided to hold two "EPC" summits each year, alternating between EU countries and non - EU members. After the Czech republic, it will be Moldavia to organise the "EPC" spring meeting. Spain is the host country in the autumn 2023 and the fourth "EPC" summit will be organised on British territory in 2024. But the agreement for holding next tops means that the "EPC" invited countries and institutions are convinced of the usefulness of further meetings in the context of the "EPC".

CONCLUSION

After the first EPC summit the conclusion is that the summit was relatively informal and intergovernmental. There was and is no-supranational aspect in this EPC idea. The first invitations for the "EPC" summit were launched by the permanent presidency of the European Union and the rotating presidency of this council (Czech republic). It's not clear which

institution/country will be responsible for the organization of the next meeting. The “EPC” would benefit from an agile, flexible governing structure that would allow for “opt-outs” and “ad hoc participations” (Future of Europe, 2022). Knowing the political decision of the first meeting for – at least – three other summits, brings us the question of a sort of permanent secretariat? Another remark is what are the criteria for an “EPC” membership? At this moment there are no existing rules. The authors Chopin – Macek & Maillard (Notre Europe: institut Delors, 2022) are writing in their study: “A country’s accession to the “EPC” must meet three conditions. (I) The country must be on the European continent under the same conditions required for the EU membership, (II) must fully comply with the Copenhagen criteria, (III) ratify the charter of fundamental rights of the European Union.”

Concerning this opinion the following remarks. The borders of the European continent are not so clear fixed. If we take this example of Turkey, only the western part of the Bosphorus (West-Istanbul) is Europa and all the rest of the territory of this republic is Asia! What also means that the Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) are not located in the European part of our planet. In addition one should also question the democratic level in some of these “EPC” invited countries. Is there a liberal political system with real free elections? Also the freedom of speech and press with the separation of state and church?

The application of the norms, written in their study, do place a lot of question marks concerning the democratic/political position of the mentioned countries and also these remarks are valid for a lot of Balkan located nations.

At present two Balkan states are in a later stage of the accession negotiations (Montenegro and Serbia) and two other nations want to start negotiations with the European Union in the near future (Albania and North Macedonia). The last dero from the Balkan region are Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. In the “Enlargement package dossier 2022” of the European Commission (EU Commission, 2022). The executive office of the Union has still a lot of remarks concerning this Balkan states in relation with fight against corruption and organised crimes, media freedom, freedom of assembly, the domestic handling of war crimes during the civil war in the nineties, the rule of law, property rights, freedom of expression, minority issues... The EU Commission says nothing about the status of candidate countries and the prevailing opinions by the political world and public opinions in the present 27 member states of European Union. In the same document (EU Commission, 2022) the text says: “In the area of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights Turkey needs to reserve the negative trend as a matter of priority...”.

All the Balkan nations and Turkey will be for the financing of the European budget – net – receivers. In other words, the chair GDP (per capita) and welfare level are situated under the E.U. average calculations. These candidates for accession negotiations will cost the E.U. budget more than they will contribute on base of the system of the own resources. In the European budgets over the last years (Matthijs, 2018 and Matthijs, 2022) the conclusion is that the member states of the last century (14 in total) are still funding this budget with 89 % à 90 % ! The accession of the 13 new members in the present century can hardly be regarded as a financial budget success. Also in the list of new candidates there are no countries in a position to become a net payer to the EU budget. In a recent study (Matthijs, 2022) the share of the EU members in the total own resources – budget 2021 figures – was as follows:

1. F.R. Germany: 23,82 %
2. France: 17,81 %
3. Italy: 12,59 %
4. Spain: 8,93 %
5. the Netherlands: 6,18 %
6. Belgium: 4,36 %
7. Poland: 4,15 %
8. Sweden: 3,11 %
9. Austria: 2,39 %
10. Denmark: 2,15 %
11. Ireland: 2,05 %.

Six countries contribute in a share between 1 % and 2 %. The remaining ten member states have a financing share of less than 1 % of the EU budget. The entry of the Balkan states, Turkey and the three eastern states brings this study to the question: is the "EPC" the waiting room for a future EU membership? A long conflict in time between the Russian federation and Ukraine can result in a risk for the "EPC" with a lot of disputed borders: Ukraine, Moldavia and Georgia vs. Russia, Armenia vs. Azerbaijan, Greece vs. Turkey, Turkey vs. Cyprus etc.

Another remark is which kind of security guarantees the "European Political Community" provide to the group of 44 "EPC" members which are not a member of the Atlantic alliance: the NATO ? This means that article 5 and 6 of the NATO treaty are inoperative for these countries, namely: Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ireland, Cyprus, Malta, Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia and Moldavia. Even art. 47.2 of the "TEU" (Treaty European Union) which provides mutual assistance between the EU states is only applicable for the 27 EU members.

A final remark is the statute of "EPC" membership: how to become a member and how to leave (voluntarily or compulsory) of the European Political Community? But it's for sure that this new European organisation will continue to exist, because the next meetings are already fixed until the first half of the year 2024.

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Herman Matthijs is full professor at the "Universiteit Gent" (University of Ghent) and the "Vrije Universiteit Brussel" (Free University Brussels). He teaches public finances, European Union budget, public management. He is member of the "High council of finances": the advisory board of the Belgium federal and state governments concerning the public budgets.

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