Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16128
12 March 2025

Interconnections between the Council of Europe and the European Political Community

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
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1. Reference to committee: Doc. 15635, Reference 4687 of 14 October 2022.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Following a proposal made by the President of the French Republic on 9 May 2022 at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe, leaders of the European Union agreed at the European Council meeting in June 2022 to launch the European Political Community, with the aim of bringing together European Union and non-European Union countries on the European continent. The ambition was to foster political dialogue and co-operation among leaders to address issues of common interest to strengthen the security, stability and prosperity of the European continent.

2. The launch of the European Political Community demonstrated the willingness of European Union leaders to rapidly react and adapt the multilateral architecture of Europe to a deeply challenging geopolitical environment, marked, in particular, by the full-scale war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

3. So far, five summits – one every six months – have been held, hosted alternately by the European Union member State holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union and a non-European Union country. Since the inaugural summit in Prague in October 2022, summits held in the Republic of Moldova, Spain, the United Kingdom and Hungary have focused on peace, prosperity, security, energy resilience, connectivity, and most recently democracy and migration.

4. The non-institutionalised and flexible nature of the European Political Community has created unique possibilities for dialogue that would otherwise not be possible in other frameworks. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that the European Political Community, a platform for political co-ordination, does not replace any existing organisation, structure or process, nor does it seek to create new ones. The Assembly also notes that the European Political Community has no legal basis establishing a formal membership. It underlines that the European Political Community has remained an informal intergovernmental platform for political dialogue between European leaders from European Union member States and non-European Union member States, in the presence of European Union institutions. Operational work is carried out by the host country and the Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, while continuity between European Political Community summits of European leaders is ensured by the President of the European Council.

5. The Assembly welcomes the participation of the Council of Europe in the last two summits of the European Political Community in London and Budapest. To ensure synergies and complementarity between the European Political Community and the treaty-based Council of Europe (Statute of the Council of Europe, ETS No. 1), a pan-European political community of 46 member States, the Assembly encourages future hosts countries to maintain this invitation to the Organisation.

6. As the European Political Community is not meant to replace the European Union's neighbourhood and enlargement policies, it adds another circle to the already existing variable geometry of European integration. In that respect, the European Political Community has yet to prove that it can contribute to the further alignment of non-European Union countries.

7. Although the nature and objectives of the Council of Europe and the European Political Community are not the same, the question of the links between the new European Political Community and the long-standing Europe-wide political activity of the Council of Europe was raised from the outset. Since then, the geographical scope of participation in the European Political Community has come closer to that of the Council of Europe membership and the wider range of issues addressed by the European Political Community has highlighted the need to seek co-operation, in line with the Reykjavik Declaration. In addition, the support of the Council of Europe to Ukraine and its efforts to hold the Russian Federation accountable for its war of aggression against Ukraine make the Organisation a key partner of the European Political Community.

8. In light of these considerations, the Assembly:

8.1. recalls that the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe met at their Fourth Summit in Reykjavik on 16 and 17 May 2023 to stand united against Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and to give further priority and direction to the work of the Council of Europe. They reiterated the pan-European role of the Council of Europe and confirmed that it is uniquely placed to bring together, on an equal footing, all the countries of Europe to protect democratic security in Europe and to counter the undermining of human rights, democracy and the rule of law;

8.2. stresses that the Council of Europe is a pan-European political community of 46 member States;

2. Draft resolution unanimously adopted by the committee on 5 March 2025.

8.3. believes that, at this pivotal moment for Europe, the Council of Europe must be an ever stronger and more resilient pillar of multilateralism. The Council of Europe should play a proactive role in the discussions related to the European political architecture. It should also maintain its leading intergovernmental role in all matters relating to human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe and its leading responsibility for the functioning of its convention system.

9. Furthermore, in this rapidly shifting geopolitical landscape, where the rules-based international order faces severe challenges, the Assembly believes that European leaders should bring the European Political Community and the Council of Europe closer together and, in line with the Reykjavik Declaration, set an example of effective and dynamic multilateralism that promotes shared values and underpins security and stability in Europe.

10. Equally, the Assembly considers that the unprecedented challenges currently facing Europe call for ever closer co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union. As reaffirmed in the Reykjavik Declaration, "the European Union is the main institutional partner of the Council of Europe in political, legal, and financial terms". The Council of Europe should further strengthen its strategic partnership with the European Union.

11. The Assembly also recalls the invaluable role of the Council of Europe in the European Union enlargement process. In this context, the Council of Europe, as the benchmark for human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe, should increase its support to enhance the level of preparedness of candidate and potential candidate countries for European Union accession.

12. Consequently, as regards relations between the Council of Europe and the European Political Community, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States, in particular European Political Community host countries and, when relevant, European Union leaders to:

12.1. ensure synergies and co-ordination between the European Political Community and the Council of Europe, notably by ensuring systematic participation of the Council of Europe in European Political Community summits;

12.2. develop, during European Political Community summits, a format for dialogue on strategic issues, with the Council of Europe, on matters falling under its mandate;

12.3. make full use of the participation of the Council of Europe in European Political Community summits for additional high-level dialogue;

12.4. develop contact points through Senior Officials in the Council of Europe Secretariat in Strasbourg, in close co-operation with the Council of Europe Liaison Office in Brussels, and in the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union;

12.5. make full use of Council of Europe instruments and work, notably on democracy through the new Democratic Pact under preparation;

12.6. consider developing a joint declaration to ensure complementarity of respective activities and develop further synergies.

13. Regarding the role of the Council of Europe, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:

13.1. strengthen the position of the Council of Europe as the leading intergovernmental organisation in Europe promoting and safeguarding human rights, democracy and the rule of law, in the evolving European and global multilateral architecture as they committed to in Reykjavik;

13.2. further develop the role of the Council of Europe as a resilient and robust political community and a platform for strategic and political dialogue, diplomacy and multilateralism, where member States can come together to address shared challenges and pursue common goals, by:

13.2.1. enhancing the political dimension of its work and bodies;

13.2.2. ensuring efficient co-ordination of functions and responsibilities with other institutions and fora within the multilateral architecture;

13.2.3. convening summits of Heads of State and Government on a more regular basis.

13.3. support the further development of Council of Europe work in the area of democratic security and democratic resilience.

14. Finally, the Assembly resolves to continue to act as a dynamic platform for pan-European political dialogue and parliamentary diplomacy.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Zsolt Németh, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. In his speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 9 May 2022, the President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron introduced the idea of creating a "European Political Community".[3] He placed his proposal in the new geopolitical context created by the full-scale war of aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the unachieved enlargement of the European Union (EU) in the Western Balkans and the emergence of new candidate countries in 2022, namely Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova:

> *"How can we organise Europe from a political perspective and with a broader scope than that of the European Union? It is our historic obligation to respond to that question today and create what I would describe here before you as "a European Political Community". This new European organisation would allow democratic European nations that subscribe to our shared core values to find a new space for political and security co-operation, co-operation in the energy sector, in transport, investments, infrastructures, the free movement of persons and in particular of our youth. Joining it would not necessarily prejudge future accession to the European Union, and it would not be closed to those who have left the EU. It would bring our Europe together, respecting its true geography, on the basis of its democratic values, with the desire to preserve the unity of our continent and by preserving the strength and ambition of our integration".* [4]

2. Within a few months, this vision of a European Political Community (EPC) became a reality. The first meeting (summit) of the EPC took place in Prague on 6 October 2022.

3. Since then, the mission of this new political forum and its place in the current European institutional architecture have been discussed and sometimes questioned, in particular its added value *vis à vis* the pan-European Council of Europe, of 46 member States, whose mandate is to "achieve a greater unity between its members". The very similar geographical scope of the EPC and the Council of Europe and the wide range of issues addressed by the EPC highlighted the need to examine their interconnections.

2. The aims, nature and functioning of the European Political Community

4. The full-scale war of aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 changed the face of Europe. In addition, 2022 was marked by new applications to join the EU: Ukraine applied for EU membership on 28 February 2022 and was granted EU candidate status on 23 June 2022. Georgia and the Republic of Moldova also applied for accession to the EU on 3 March 2022.

5. Against this challenging background, President Macron proposed the founding of the EPC on 9 May 2022 during the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The project was officially discussed during the European Council meetings of 23 and 24 June 2022. EU leaders held a strategic debate on the relations of the EU with its partners in Europe as a whole and ultimately agreed to establish the EPC.[5]

6. The aim was to provide a flexible platform for political co-ordination for European countries across the continent. It would involve all European countries with shared core values. The objective was to foster political dialogue and co-operation to address issues of common interest in order to strengthen the security, stability and prosperity of the European continent.

7. It was emphasised that such a framework would not replace existing EU policies and instruments, in particular enlargement, and would fully respect the EU's decision-making autonomy.

8. The EPC materialised into an informal platform for intergovernmental co-operation and dialogue between European leaders from EU member States and non-EU countries, holding regular meetings (summits) in the presence of EU institutions. Operational work is carried out by the host country and the

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3. The idea of a European political community was first proposed in 1952 and then shelved. The idea resurfaced in the 1960s and 1970s in various forms but was never implemented. It also inspired President François Mitterrand's proposal for a "European Confederation" in 1989, which was also not implemented, but was a precursor to future developments in European integration.

4. www.vie-publique.fr/discours/285102-emmanuel-macron-09052022-union-europeenne.

5. www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/24/european-council-conclusions-on-wider-europe-and-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-23-june-2022/.

Secretariat of the Council of the EU, while continuity between EPC meetings of European leaders is ensured by the President of the European Council. As it is not treaty-based, there is no formal membership. Participants are invited to attend the EPC meetings by the host countries.

9. It was agreed that EPC summits would be held twice a year to ensure regular high-level discussion and effective follow-up for EPC initiatives. The spring summit would be hosted by a non-EU member State. The autumn summit would be hosted by the EU member State holding the presidency of the Council of the EU at that particular time.

10. The EPC aims to promote synergies and help develop concrete co-operation projects in a number of areas of mutual interest: the protection of critical infrastructure (health, food, transport, energy and financial services), the fight against cyberattacks and disinformation, energy resilience, co-operation on migration issues, co-ordination of work on major regional issues, and support for Ukraine's reconstruction.

11. It has been argued that the EPC also aims to strengthen relations with countries such as the United Kingdom and some States in the Caucasus.

3. The European Political Community and the European Union enlargement

12. The EPC is not an alternative to EU membership, and it cannot replace the existing EU policies and instruments. However, it was also designed to assist the candidates and potential candidates (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and Kosovo*[6]) in a number of areas on the inevitably long road to EU membership. It shall provide a flexible policy co-ordination platform for European countries and promote political dialogue and co-operation to find solutions to shared issues. Participation in the EPC should also help the participating countries to get to know each other better and gradually grow closer together.

13. It has sometimes been argued that the exceptional and historic situation on the European continent might call for the definition of a new model, which would overturn or complete the approach adopted so far - already partially revised recently.[7]

14. In its original form, the accession process, which is primarily legal and economic, requires the candidate country to incorporate the *acquis communautaire* into its national legislation and to bring its economy up to standard with a view to making it viable and able to compete on the internal market. During the accession negotiations, the completion of these steps leads to the opening and closing of thematic chapters, which make up the future Accession Treaty to be ratified.

15. In order to enhance the credibility of the process, a revised enlargement methodology was introduced in 2019, putting more emphasis on reforms in key areas, such as the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, the economy and the functioning of democratic institutions. The accession methodology strengthens political governance, provides for the possibility of halting or even reversing negotiations, and encourages greater engagement from EU member States. The relevant countries need to address the requirements in order to advance on the path of EU integration. On the other hand, the EU needs to deliver on its commitments.

16. The EU has a structured and credible offer of agreements with States that wish and are able to participate in economic integration without wishing to subscribe to the political dimension of the European project. However, it does not have an instrument to satisfy the opposite need: to respond to States that express the wish to join the political project, but that do not have the capacity to become part of the single market in the short and medium term, without endangering their own economy and/or destabilising the single market.[8]

17. A discussion on EU enlargement reform policy, to overcome the deadlock in the accession negotiations in the Western Balkans and address new applications for membership, resurfaced in 2022. It called for a rethink of the accession process, suggesting making it faster, and for "gradual, phased integration" of countries aspiring to membership.

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6. *All reference to Kosovo in this document, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.
7. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/2021-enlargement-package-european-commission-assesses-and-sets-out-reform-priorities-western-balkans-2021-10-19_en.
8. https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/la-communaute-politique-europeenne/.

18. As the EPC is not meant to replace the EU's neighbourhood and enlargement policies, it now adds another circle to the already existing variable geometry of European integration. However, the EPC has yet to prove that it can contribute to the further alignment of non-EU countries. Success will largely depend on whether and how the EPC succeeds in establishing its relevance and integrating itself into the EU's enlargement policy. Much will also depend on the evolution of the EU and the progress it achieves in engaging with the associated and candidate countries, which might imply restructuring and reorganising the accession processes, with the EPC as a tool in the European toolbox. The EPC has yet to prove also that it can keep and deliver on the promise of the wider Europe that does not exclude but integrates.

4. The geographical participation

19. The EPC has no legal basis for formal membership. The first EPC meeting in Prague in 6 October 2022 brought together the leaders of European countries on an equal footing and in a spirit of unity. 44 were invited. In addition to the EU27, there were:

– the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo);

– the countries of the Associated Trio (Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine);

– Armenia and Azerbaijan;

– the four European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein);

– the United Kingdom and Türkiye.

20. Subsequent meetings were then held in the Republic of Moldova in June 2023, in Spain in October 2023, in the United Kingdom in July 2024 and in Hungary in November 2024. The next EPC meetings are reportedly planned to take place in Albania in spring 2025 and then in Denmark.

21. 42 Heads of State or Government, including from 24 EU member States, attended the fifth (and to date the last) EPC meeting held in Budapest on 7 November 2024.[9] The geographical scope of participation in the EPC meeting was again close to that of the membership of the Council of Europe.

22. The EPC meetings were all held in the presence of invited EU institutions. The Council of Europe was invited to participate in the last two EPC Summits in London and Budapest and was represented by its Secretary General.

5. Thematic areas covered by the European Political Community summits

23. The five summits held so far have focused on peace, prosperity, security, energy resilience, connectivity, and most recently democracy and migration.

24. The first summit of the EPC took place on 6 October 2022 in Prague under the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU (July to December 2022). The leaders mainly discussed peace and security issues, in particular the full-scale war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the energy crisis, with the aim of sending a clear message of unity in a context dominated by the full-scale war of aggression. The Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their unfailing support for Ukraine and discussed the need to build a new space for political dialogue and co-operation in Europe.

25. Four roundtables were organised in the framework of the summit, each focusing on one of the two main topics: peace and security on the one hand, and climate, energy and the economy on the other. The summit aimed to improve co-ordination of foreign policy and security in Europe; to develop stronger partnerships in the fields of energy, transport, trade, research and education; and to bring together civil society and young people from almost all European countries.

26. At the following summit in Chisinau, in June 2023, leaders discussed joint efforts for peace and security, energy resilience and connectivity, as well as mobility in Europe. In Granada, in October 2023, they discussed how to make Europe more resilient, prosperous, and geostrategic. In London, they discussed

9. The non-EU participants were Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Liechtenstein, the Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, San Marino, Serbia, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and Kosovo.

defending and securing democracy, migration, energy, and connectivity. In Budapest, European leaders addressed the key security challenges facing Europe in the context of ongoing conflicts, including the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine and the escalation in the Middle East. Breakout sessions also focused on migration (including irregular migration and its instrumentalisation) and economic security, as well as connectivity-related issues, such as energy, transport, IT, and global trade. The EPC summit consisted of an opening plenary session, four thematic breakout sessions, a closing plenary session and bilateral meetings.

27. The EPC summits have the advantage of providing, in their margins, the opportunity to hold high-level bilateral meetings and "mini-lateral" talks, which prove to be an added value of these summits.

6. The European Political Community and the Council of Europe: different and complementary

28. Presently, the EPC is not an international organisation, and it has no permanent secretariat. Reportedly, EU member States would generally prefer to avoid institutionalising the EPC, which should remain a flexible platform for political co-ordination. However, some would see an advantage in institutionalisation with a dedicated secretariat, and it appears that this issue has not yet been fully settled. There are also different views on the use and the purpose of the EPC. Beyond the issues addressed, EPC summits provided useful opportunities for high-level meetings. The non-institutionalised and flexible nature of the EPC has created unique possibilities for dialogue that would otherwise not be possible in other frameworks.

29. Although the nature and objectives of the Council of Europe and the EPC are not the same, the question of the links between the new EPC and the Council of Europe's long-standing Europe-wide political activity was raised from the outset. The geographical scope of participation in the EPC is close to that of the membership of the Council of Europe, and the wide range of issues addressed by the EPC highlighted the need to seek complementarity.

30. Since its foundation, the Council of Europe has been the leading intergovernmental organisation in Europe in promoting and safeguarding democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Its member States committed to achieving greater unity in order to safeguard and realise the ideals and principles which are their common heritage. Whilst being the guardian of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the Council of Europe is also a political community, as recalled by the Reykjavik Declaration and the Parliamentary Assembly.[10]

31. Therefore, the invitation to a summit of the EPC immediately raised the question of the interconnections of the EPC with the Council of Europe's longstanding Europe-wide political activity. Discussions about possible interference or duplication increased when it emerged that neither the Council of Europe, nor the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were invited to the first meetings of the EPC held in Prague in 2022 and in Chisinau in 2023, although the Presidents of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council were present.

32. At the Council of Europe's Reykjavik Summit held in May 2023, President Macron described the relevance of the EPC as a European forum to discuss security issues and related armed conflicts, highlighting the difference with the Council of Europe as the largest European organisation dedicated to strengthening democratic security.[11]

33. When examining the interconnections, one should start with the reasons for creating the EPC, which are clearly multi-layered:

– to show and develop the European unity and co-operation in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine;

– to address the new requests for EU membership but also the "enlargement fatigue";

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10. See Recommendation 2245 (2023) "The Reykjavik Summit of the Council of Europe – United around values in the face of extraordinary challenges" and Resolution 2473 (2022) "Strengthening the role of the Council of Europe as a cornerstone of the European political architecture".

11. "We have other forums for discussing armed conflicts and major strategic balances – and the European Political Community, which we founded in Prague and which will shortly be bringing us together in Chişinau, is a place where we can work hard on all that, but there is only one place where we can work to promote our continent's "democratic security" and that is the Council of Europe."

– to provide a flexible forum for informal discussions among European leaders on European security and energy policy for all European countries.

34. Neither of these *raison d'être* could jeopardise the field of action of the Council of Europe.

35. The EPC aims for more integration among EU member States as well as candidate countries. This community has its roots in the idea of "*Europe à deux vitesses*". It is also known as "core Europe" and "two-speed Europe". It means having different levels and paces of integration in different parts of Europe depending on the political situation of each country.

36. It should again be stressed that the Council of Europe and the EPC do not have the same goals. The main objective of the Council of Europe is to promote democracy and protect human rights and the rule of law in Europe while the EPC has a wider range of objectives, as mentioned above (security policy, energy resilience, energy infrastructure development etc).

37. The EPC has, in particular, the potential to contribute to concrete policy proposals in three areas: energy, connectivity and security.[12] EPC summits offer a real opportunity to begin the task of deepening and broadening the issue of energy security across the continent. EPC countries could also work together to secure critical raw material supply chains. Moreover, it could aim to focus the interest of European industry, especially in the battery value chain, to get a better sense of the opportunities.

38. Concerning the mandate of the Council of Europe, while national defence is explicitly excluded from its scope of responsibility, the Organisation has focused on protecting democratic security. Security is a wider concept than national defence, and is largely based on respect for democratic processes, human rights and the rule of law. The concept of democratic security, first endorsed by the Council of Europe's Heads of State and Government at the 1993 Vienna Summit, is more relevant than ever.

39. Furthermore, the Heads of State and Government of the 46 member States of the Council of Europe met at their Fourth Summit on 16 and 17 May 2023 to stand united against Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and to give further priority and direction to the work of the Council of Europe. They reiterated the pan-European role of the Council of Europe and confirmed that it is uniquely placed to bring together, on an equal footing, all the countries of Europe to protect democratic security in Europe and to counter the undermining of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. They also stressed that the Council of Europe is a pan-European political community and committed to strengthening the role of the Council of Europe in the evolving European multilateral architecture and in global governance by enhancing its external dimension.

40. The Reykjavik Summit also confirmed the strategic partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union and reaffirmed that "the European Union is the main institutional partner of the Council of Europe in political, legal, and financial terms". In that respect, the European Parliament Resolution on the institutional relations between the EU and the Council of Europe,[13] adopted on 18 April 2023, had already underlined the invaluable role of the Council of Europe in the EU's enlargement process "since it cooperates with the EU in supporting candidate and potential candidate countries in carrying out reforms and helping them meet the EU accession criteria on the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities and monitoring progress in these areas". It had also stressed "that cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe in the area of enlargement should be further strengthened in order to become more formal, structured and systematic."

41. In addition, on 17 May 2024, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,[14] in the context of EU enlargement, recalled "the Council of Europe's unique set of instruments to provide full support and to raise the level of preparedness of candidate countries and potential candidates for EU accession". It also recalled "the key benchmarking role of the Council of Europe in the areas of human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe, based on the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding", "bearing in mind the ongoing progress in the Western Balkans, as well as the developments of December 2023, in particular the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and granting candidate status to Georgia, as well as the opening of accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina in March 2024".

12. https://ecfr.eu/article/the-future-of-the-european-political-community/.
13. Texts adopted – Institutional relations between the EU and the Council of Europe – 18 April 2023.
14. CM/Del/Dec(2024)133/3, 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 17 May 2024) – 3. Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

7. Building further synergies and interconnections

42. In line with the Reykjavik Summit, the Council of Europe was invited to participate in the EPC summits in London and Budapest and was represented by its Secretary General.

43. In this context, it should also be stressed that the support of the Council of Europe to Ukraine and its efforts to hold the Russian Federation accountable for its war of aggression against Ukraine make the Organisation a key partner of the EPC.

44. As regards the relationship between the Council of Europe and the EPC, it is therefore necessary to develop synergies and co-ordination, notably by ensuring the systematic participation of the Council of Europe in the EPC summits.

45. There should also be a format for dialogue on strategic issues, with the Council of Europe, on matters falling within its mandate. Meetings with representatives of the Council of Europe should also be organised.

46. Contact points could also be established through senior officials in the Council of Europe Secretariat in Strasbourg, in close co-operation with the Council of Europe Liaison Office in Brussels, and in the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU.

47. In addition, the EPC should make full use of the instruments and work of the Council of Europe, notably in the field of democracy through the new Democratic Pact under preparation.

48. On the other hand, the Council of Europe should take a proactive role in the discussions related to the European political architecture. It should also maintain its leading intergovernmental role in all matters relating to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as its leading responsibility for the good functioning of its unique Convention system.

49. Finally, let us recall the words of Nataša Pirc Musar, President of Slovenia, during her speech at the third part session of the Assembly in 2023: “Maybe I can say only one thing: the Council of Europe is 75 years old. So, there is a lot of knowledge, a lot of history here. Each new community, new platform is welcome if they discuss topics which are in [the] common [interest] of the states which are gathering around the platform. The more the better – but let us not forget: the Council of Europe is the heart and soul of Europe. Nobody can replace the Council of Europe.”[15]

15. Verbatim records of 21 June 2023.