



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

European Political Community Summit – the identity crisis continues



The experiment with a new approach to problem-solving in Europe through the European Political Community did not, even after its third attempt, provide an answer to the issue that has troubled it from the start: what is the purpose of this platform?

Granada in Spain gathered 49 European leaders for the EPC summit. This has been the third consecutive summit where the EPC has tried to position itself as an informal but effective forum for resolving pressing continental issues.

With the assumption that there are many issues they could solve jointly, it should be a forum where there is equality (of interests) between those who are already in the 27-member EU club and those outside of it.

The summit in Spain ended without any joint conclusion on any issue, not even a joint press conference, which the hosts cancelled at the last moment without explanation.

There was obviously nothing substantial to satisfy the curiosity of the army of around 700 journalists.

It was vital to have discussions and formulate opinions with partners within the EU regarding at least 3 primary issues nominated by the hosts - artificial intelligence, climate action and support for Ukraine.

Avoiding difficult topics

However, it was clear even before the summit that the suggested framework would not gain consensus.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak intended to discuss the migrant issue with his European partners and urge them to adopt a strict immigration policy like his. However, the Spanish hosts objected to bringing up the subject with the other participants.

It was a cautious manoeuvre because there is still a long way to reach a consensus within the EU regarding measures against illegal

migrants, let alone in such an expanded, pan-European format.

EU leaders will postpone this challenging issue for their regular summit, which will take place in Brussels at the end of the month.

There were also high hopes that European leaders would seek a joint response to the crisis between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which recently escalated due to the Armenian population's exodus from the disputed Karabakh territory.

However, the leaders of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Azerbaijan, İlham Aliyev, did not attend the summit, so in their absence, every debate was pointless.

Azerbaijan wants to resolve this dispute, but only in the company of EU leaders in Brussels. Not at the gathering of the informal bloc, whose architect is French President Emmanuel Macron.

The absence of the Azerbaijani leader from the summit in Granada is most certainly a consequence of Aliyev's view that France has been biased regarding the Karabakh dispute and supported Armenia.

There was no debate on another significant crisis on European soil: the one in Kosovo, where heavily armed Serbian paramilitary attacked the police and killed a Kosovar policeman in an attempt to destabilise it at the end of its negotiations with Serbia on the normalisation of mutual relations.

The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, and the President of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani, also came to Granada but did not meet, as Ms Osmani demanded that the EU impose sanctions on Serbia before any talks take place.

Their dialogue will continue regardless of Granada and the EPC through a regular process supported by the US and the EU, but with more problems due to the still unresolved crisis, which could ignite a new hotbed of war in the Balkans.

Macron's invention is still not working

President Macron could not return from Granada to Paris content since after 3 attempts, his "child," the EPC, still has not formed its identity.

The presidents of all European states met at the previous 2 summits in Prague in October last year and Chisinau, the capital of Moldova, last June. It was unclear even then what they were trying to accomplish.

One of the motives for establishing the EPC was certainly Russian aggression against Ukraine, as a desire to make solidarity with Kyiv a pan-European duty and build a continental consensus around it, not only within the EU.

The second motive stems from President Macron's earlier strategy of internal transformation of the EU into an organisation with several levels of membership (rights and obligations), whereby the current EU would expand to the East and the Balkans.

Macron's plan came at the same time as the departure of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and as an attempt by the French president to impose the leadership of France, including his own, in the European framework through seeking greater functionality for the Union through its reform.

The EPC has not responded to any of the set goals so far. The big question is whether there will be another opportunity for that.

The UK has an opportunity to revitalise the EPC

The summit in Granada served as a forum for one-on-one discussions between heads of state and government and as a kind of political expo where bilateral issues are discussed and bilateral agreements are made.

Spain and Granada were decent and friendly

hosts, with no chance, but also no ambition, to end the summit with some shared attitudes.

Great Britain will host the next, fourth EPC summit next spring. This will represent a risk for the existing leadership format. The lower-ranking officials would start attending the EPC meetings without the mandate to make significant decisions.

This risk is not high-level even though it exists. The political authority of the host will not allow the guests to reduce their participation despite already present disinterest regarding the fate of the EPC.

The biggest challenge will be defining topics to gather and involve all European nations in a complete and benevolent capacity and, as a result, create the outlines of the identity of this new forum.

If the UK manages to pull the EPC out of the identity crisis, which has dogged it since day one, it could profile itself as its new pivot and highest authority next spring. Otherwise, the spring summit of the EPC in Britain could be the last "big one" before its regression, which now seems quite definite.