



**European
Political
Community
Summit**

Budapest
7 November 2024



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A New Era for Europe: Strategic Goals and Challenges at the European Political Community (EPC) Summit in Budapest

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Hungary is set to host the fifth European Political Community (EPC) summit on 7 November—a milestone diplomatic event in its modern history. The EPC, which first convened in the Czech Republic on 6 October 2022, brings together leaders from across Europe to shape the continent’s strategic direction and enhance collective security. This year’s summit in Budapest is expected to gather leaders from 44 European countries, all united under an original vision by French President Emmanuel Macron: to create a pan-European forum where countries collaborate on Europe’s grand strategic goals.

Amid the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, Russia and Belarus are notably absent from the invitation list, but nearly all other European countries—including the UK, the Western Balkans, Turkey, and Caucasian nations—are expected to participate. A unique feature of the EPC summit is its emphasis on non-EU participation, underscoring that the event extends beyond strictly EU-focused interests and signals an inclusive European perspective that welcomes diverse voices.

The summit’s strength lies in its 'minilateral' format, allowing leaders to engage in focused, practical initiatives within small groups or through bilateral negotiations. Notable past achievements include initiating an EU peacekeeping mission between Armenia and Azerbaijan and laying the groundwork for revitalizing EU-UK relations with France’s involvement. Following the EPC summit, an informal European Council (EC) meeting with EU leaders will also take place, also in Budapest, seamlessly connecting Hungary’s role in the EPC with its responsibilities under the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Precisely because countries attending the summit are a mix of EU and non-EU countries, it should be noted that the framework of the event differs from those held in the ‘liberal Brussels bubble’ - and this is an important difference. The policy goals that Turkic or Western Balkan states often

pursue offer realist perspectives to Western European leaders that they do not often encounter – and it is often agreed, in hindsight, that these policy goals make a lot of sense. Furthermore, the sovereigntist stance of the British further balances possible EU dominance at the summit. Keeping these in mind, Hungary is in a particularly good spot at this event as a host and possible mediator, as it has good relations with the aforementioned countries, and is an EU member state as well. Additionally, with the election of Trump and the possible, albeit slow turnaround of the German government towards arguing for an immediate ceasefire (which may not last forever if their government collapses) the Hungarian government's position is being legitimized from several sides. The summit is therefore important for our country not only because it is a matter of prestige to hold such a diplomatic summit, but also because the government is well placed to assert its position.

One of the greatest challenges facing the European Union today is the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, which has now persisted for nearly 1,000 days. While European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and several EU countries have pledged unwavering support to Ukraine, the reality is that Ukraine's military strength relies heavily on the United States. Trump, who has just been re-elected, has frequently suggested that the war is not a top priority for the U.S., and his vice president, J.D. Vance, has raised questions about the long-term strategy of sustained military aid to Ukraine.

Trump's return to office significantly increases the likelihood of a diplomatic push to end the war in the near future. This new dynamic will undoubtedly place Europe—and the EU in particular—under considerable pressure to recalibrate its response. Because of Zelensky's possible attendance at the upcoming summit, the spotlight will be on his message to European leaders and, more crucially, their responses. In the end, each European country—not EU institutions—will decide the extent of its continued support for Ukraine, especially as Europe may soon find itself largely alone in this commitment. For Zelensky, the fact that neither France nor Germany is currently in a position of stability may be a troubling sign for securing steadfast support. To be fair, while the Commission is usually an institution to announce the EU's common position, the habit is to do that only after necessary questions have been answered. Therefore, while one should not expect far-reaching formal statements at the end of the EPC summit (which is not the point of the forum in the first place), the policy orientation may be set in the background here, making the discussions at Budapest crucial, especially in light of the ever-more legitimized stance of the Hungarian government.

Competitiveness is expected to be one of the main issues of the summit, as the security of the continent is as much about the economic as the security dimension, in line with the objectives of the EPC. This assumption is supported by the fact that we are talking about an important issue for the host country, Hungary as well. Based on a similar logic, however, it could also be assumed that migration policy will be on the agenda, which has already been a major policy focus for the previous EPC summit in Great Britain (it has a precedent to be talked about) and is similarly an important policy for Hungary. Furthermore, as the externalization of migration policy is underway in the EU, the EPC is a perfect environment for EU and non-EU countries to discuss, agree, and later start relevant initiatives.

The expectation for Europe to achieve strategic autonomy has always been clear. However, the prospect of a second Trump presidency may force Europe to take this goal more seriously, especially as it pertains to economic security. For those who align with the realist school of international relations, a second term for Trump may sound like a return to protectionism. Until now, Europe has been heavily reliant on the U.S., particularly in the wake of recent global crises. A second Trump presidency could have a paradoxical effect: it might actually push Europe, especially the EU, to accelerate its efforts toward making the EU more competitive.

There is broad agreement on the diagnosis—Europe’s global competitiveness is lagging behind both the U.S. and China. According to the Draghi report released in September, Europe needs new markets and fresh momentum to catch up. One of the key objectives of the Hungarian EU Presidency is to strengthen the EU’s competitiveness, with a focus on connectivity and pragmatic trade policies as a potential solution.

Hungary is playing a leading role in making the EU to act effectively and decisively, and the good relationship with Trump can help him. Through this, he will also be able to do much to improve EU-US relations and to represent European interests. On the latter, Hungary could be one of the most important driving forces on the continent. Hungary is playing a pivotal role in this, and its strong relationship with Trump can be a significant asset. This connection will not only help strengthen EU-US relations but also enable Hungary to better advocate for European interests. In this regard, Hungary has the potential to become one of the most influential driving forces on the continent.