

## **PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF FRENCH PRESIDENT E. MACRON’S IDEA OF A EUROPEAN POLITICAL COMMUNITY AND ITS ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND POTENTIAL RISKS**

### **Author:**

Bohdan Ivashchenko

### **ORIGINS OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL COMMUNITY PROJECT**

In April this year, Emmanuel Macron was elected President of France for the second time. His re-election was met with enthusiasm by liberal-democratic politicians in Europe, the United States and Ukraine, because the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, who was hostile towards the European Union and NATO and sympathetic to Vladimir Putin, did not become the head of France. Thus, the foreign policy course of one of the most powerful states of the European Union has remained unchanged, which is a positive factor for stability on the continent in the context of maintaining the international front of support for Ukraine in the fight against the Russian Federation.

Russian aggression against Ukraine has virtually forced the European Union to reconsider the existing threats and accelerated the process of finding its place in international politics. The European Union has suffered heavy economic losses. The danger of energy dependence on Russia became obvious and prompted Europeans to look for alternative energy suppliers. There was an increase in the influence of the United States, as a country whose economy was less affected by the war and which confirmed its key role in ensuring the security of European partners. Within the EU, the role of the European Commission, which was one of the driving forces in coordinating the response to Russian aggression, has become more prominent. And although economically European countries have incurred significant losses, as we know, crises also create opportunities. Under the current circumstances, Emmanuel Macron is trying to take a leadership position in the EU. The French President sees room for strengthening the role of the EU as a subject of international politics and a means of promoting French national interests.

On May 9, 2022, the French President proposed to create a new format that reflects François Mitterrand’s 1989 idea of a “European Confederation”. The new project,

which would be, according to Macron, “a rethinking of our geography and the organization of our continent”, was conditionally outlined as the “European Political Community”.

One should note that the new format is not revolutionary, but a logical continuation of the European policy of the French President. In order to embrace the essence and origins of Emmanuel Macron’s idea, it is worth reviewing his previous initiatives and statements.

Even before his first election, Emmanuel Macron expressed an ambitious vision of his country’s role in international relations. His election promise to restore the grandeur of France vividly demonstrates the belief in the special role of his country, and the intention to restore the greatness of the European Union is evidence of the high importance of the European direction of French foreign policy.

The first election of Emmanuel Macron took place in 2017 during turbulent times for Europe. A year before, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, and Donald Trump was elected in the United States. Nationalism, euroscepticism and populism were on the rise across Europe.[1] At that time, the newly elected President of France defined the main foreign policy tasks within the EU. The challenges faced by Europe, from the point of view of the French leadership, created opportunities for France, and the new energetic leader intended to make France the flagship state of a renewed Europe. These opportunities, in particular, were provided by the reduction of American influence on the continent and British one in the European Union. At the EU level, the need for a new positioning was motivated by the global geopolitical confrontation and the relative advantages of the U.S. and China compared to the EU.

Against this background, the discourse on implementing the concept of “strategic autonomy” or, as it is called in France, “European sovereignty” has intensified in Europe. European sovereignty, according to Emmanuel Macron’s Sorbonne speech, envisages a Europe that:

- independently guarantees its own security;
- jointly solves the problem of migration;
- has a foreign policy focused on certain priorities: first of all, on the traditional for the French vector Mediterranean region and Africa;
- is an economic leader and holds leading positions in sustainable development, technology and innovation.[2]

The full implementation of Emmanuel Macron’s plan is possible only by reforming the European Union. This process requires time, readiness of the member states, political

will of the governments, legitimacy of their actions, which depends on the support of these reforms by the citizens of the EU countries.

The European Union has been working in this direction. The proposal to create a European Political Community was announced at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Holding such a conference was also a proposal of Emmanuel Macron, first mentioned in 2019. Thus, the French President pursues a methodical and consistent policy on the transformation of Europe. Initially, the idea of the Conference on the Future of Europe was introduced to revise the political structure of the continent. The initiative provided for the development of solutions for reforming the EU, taking the opinion of ordinary citizens into account.[3] This step gives legitimacy to the further promotion and possible acceleration of the implementation of the EU reform. At the moment, the French President is adapting the achievement of his vision in accordance with the changing external conditions, and therefore proposed the initiative of the European Political Community, which will unite European countries with non-EU countries.

Between the first mention of Emmanuel Macron's initiative and the founding summit, the French president himself and the European institutions provided some details of the future initiative.

In his May speech, Macron noted that the new format was being created in order to find a new space for political cooperation, security, collaboration in the field of energy, transport, investment in infrastructure, movement of people, in particular young people. According to the conclusions of the European Council of June 23, the purpose of the European Political Community is to promote political dialogue and cooperation to address issues of common interest in order to strengthen security, stability and prosperity of the European continent. It was pointed out that such a framework will not replace existing EU policies and instruments, including enlargement, and will fully respect the autonomy of decision-making of the European Union.[5]

It is worth noting that the defined tasks overlap with the goals of the recently adopted Strategic Compass of the European Union, which sets out a shared vision of the Union's defence and security policy for the next 5-10 years. [6] The Strategic Compass pays particular attention to the EU's partnership with other states and the analysis of the provisions of this document gives a better understanding of what the initiators of the European Political Community expect from the participants of the initiative. "Partnerships are an essential instrument to support the EU's ambition to be global strategic player. Partners will also benefit from a stronger and more capable EU in

security and defence. They can help us uphold the rules-based international order and effective multilateralism, with the UN at its core, set international norms and standards and contribute to peace and security around the world.” The document sets out the intention to reinforce individual partnerships as long as they are mutually beneficial, serve the interests of the EU and support common values. The European Union will also continue to invest in the resilience of partners in the bordering countries and beyond, in particular through the Union’s broader instruments for peace, security, neighbourhood, development and cooperation.

## PROJECTIONS AND PROSPECTS

The first summit of the European Political Community took place in Prague on October 6. It was attended by 44 states: EU member states, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, and Georgia.[8] Ukraine was represented by Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyi addressed the leaders of the European Political Community online. The war in Ukraine and the energy crisis were the main topics at the summit. The new format is an informal platform where leaders of states had the opportunity to discuss problematic issues and find ways to solve them in personal conversations. Ukraine showed a proactive approach to the summit and became the only country to submit its proposals to the EPC format. One of them was that the priority of the Community should be the establishment of peace on its entire territory.[9] Volodymyr Zelenskyi, speaking at the meeting via video link, called on the leaders to turn the new political community into a European Community of Peace.

It was agreed to hold further summits in this format at the highest level twice a year. The places of the next three meetings were also agreed and publicly announced. In the spring of 2023, the leaders will meet in Moldova, a candidate country for EU membership, part of which is under Russian occupation. Autumn summit is to be held in Spain, which will preside over the EU Council. After that the leaders will meet in the UK, whose participation in the founding summit was in question, and on whose participation the further success of this initiative depends.

So far, there are no details on the further organizational structure of the new initiative, but currently the informality of this platform can be considered an undoubted advantage of the European Political Community over the European Neighbourhood Policy as a tool for approximation of the foreign policy of the EU and neighbouring states. Previously, the EU’s cooperation with other states of the continent mostly relied on the bureaucratic process. The summits of the European Political Community, in

turn, provide for a meeting at the highest level.[10] Usually, the decisions taken at the summits by the leaders of the states have a greater prospect of being implemented, and in a shorter period of time than in case the process of implementation of the decision would rely on the bureaucratic apparatus. At the founding summit, the countries did not even develop a joint statement on the results of the event. This allowed to avoid discussions on the format of the final document and possible contradictions that could arise in the process of its approval.

In the context of enlargement policy, the new format has raised concerns about a potential attempt to slow down the process and replace full membership of Ukraine and other candidates with participation in the European Political Community. This version has been repeatedly refuted, in particular by Emmanuel Macron himself. At a meeting with Moldovan President Maia Sandu, the French President clarified that the new format aims to “create a new framework for structuring cooperation, bringing together democratic European countries that adhere to our core values and regardless of whether they seek to join, have left or do not intend to join the European Union”. “This Community is not an alternative to the accession process, but a complement to it,” he said.[11] Although Emmanuel Macron denied this assumption, one should still remember his position on enlargement. In 2019, the French President stated: “The critics of enlargement are right. I am more than skeptical of those who say that the future of Europe lies in further enlargement when we cannot find agreement among the 28 countries.” [12] Since that year, France, together with the Netherlands, has blocked the launch of EU membership negotiations with Albania and Macedonia. Regarding Ukraine, during a speech at the Conference on the Future of Europe, the French leader suggested that Ukraine’s accession to the EU could take “several decades”. In general, Macron is skeptical about the prospect of EU enlargement, especially in the eastern direction. Even in the neighborhood policy, France preferred the development of the Union for the Mediterranean over the Eastern Partnership. Therefore, it is likely that in the future Ukrainian diplomats will have to make great efforts to convince France to approve Ukraine’s accession to the EU. At the Prague summit it was vital to reiterate with the closest partners in Eastern Europe that the initiative cannot be seen as an alternative to full membership. The assumption cannot be rejected that the harsh reaction of Ukraine and Eastern European states after the announcement of the initiative forced Emmanuel Macron to make excuses, but did not change the desire to suspend the enlargement process, if there was one.

It should be noted that Brussels, which also endorsed the idea of creating a European Political Community, represented by the President of the European Council Charles

Michel and the head of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, as opposed to Emmanuel Macron, support Ukraine's potential accession.

Ukraine is not interested in a substitute format for full membership. Any initiatives that contribute to the convergence of Ukraine's and the EU's policies, enhancing de facto integration and interdependence are positive factors. However, at present, against the backdrop of Russian aggression, Ukraine's defense policy is already directly linked to the EU and the state is ready to participate in joint projects in the military-industrial complex, as well as security and defense initiatives after the war with Russia. Currently, the European Political Community is viewed by Ukraine rather in the context of the EU's ability to involve as many states as possible in the coalition supporting Ukraine (the "Ramstein Coalition") and create more favorable conditions for continuing the fight. It is unlikely that this format will become a place where the post-war order in Europe will be decided, since it does not provide for the participation of other important members of the G7—the United States, Japan and Canada, which play a critical role in countering Russia and influence the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war, along with other non-European democracies—Australia and South Korea, which are also not engaged in the new initiative.

The security dimension of the partnership is a priority for the EU and is essential for the implementation of the concept of European sovereignty, and in this regard Ukraine has a lot to offer the EU. Currently, it is Ukraine that de facto protects the eastern flank of Europe and has the most experienced and one of the largest armies of the continent. Further participation of Ukraine in security and defense initiatives will strengthen the EU's position in the international arena. This is especially true for the possibility of creating a European army. The EU's economic power and soft power are undoubted advantages of the Union. However, European sovereignty is impossible without the ability to project power beyond the continent. In this aspect, Ukraine is an asset that will significantly reinforce the capabilities of the European Union.

The effectiveness of the new initiative may be limited by the interstate contradictions and conflicts that currently exist in Europe. For years, the EU has facilitated changes in the behavior of neighboring states through its soft power. In 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy was adopted, which defined the framework of interaction with neighbouring states. The ENP aimed to promote stability, security and prosperity in the EU's adjacent regions, both to the south and to the east. This policy is based on the values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, and according to the principle of "more for more"—the more progress a state makes in democratic reforms, the stronger partnership the EU offers to the state. Ukraine has been and still formally remains a member of the Eastern Partnership together with Moldova, Georgia, Belarus,

Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, there can be no single regional policy of the EU towards the states of this format, and a more flexible differentiated approach is needed. In recent years, it has become obvious that no belt of stability around Europe has been created. The authoritarian regime in Belarus has utterly fallen into dependence on the Russian Federation and is providing territory for an attack on Ukraine. In the South Caucasus, fighting resumes from time to time between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Tensions between Türkiye and Greece are still present. Negative processes in the sphere of democracy were observed in Georgia, as a result of which the country did not receive the EU candidate status. In the Balkans, Serbia was one step away from attacking Kosovo in the summer. Given such a wide range of tension points, there are doubts not only about the prospects for a general settlement, but also regarding the chances to coordinate and bring closer the policies of all European countries. Within the EU itself, states have united around democratic values to a larger extent during the war. However, outside the European Union, unification around democratic values can hardly become an incentive for policy change. First of all, this concerns the policies of Azerbaijan, Türkiye and Serbia. Although, the opportunity to gather leaders of states and reach a political agreement that meets their pragmatic interests can be an advantage of the European Political Community.

In the case of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the OSCE Minsk Group was organized in 1992, mediated by the United States, Russia and France. It failed to achieve a diplomatic solution, thus a change of approaches is needed in the future, taking into account the geopolitical changes in the South Caucasus. It seems that now the conditions for a possible normalization of relations in the region have been created and the EU, especially Emmanuel Macron, is trying to find further opportunities and take advantage of existing ones. The readiness of the hostile countries of the South Caucasus to take steps towards normalization of relations is evidenced by informal trilateral and bilateral talks in Prague between the leaders of Türkiye, Azerbaijan and Armenia. It seems that Nikol Pashinyan is ready to revise the Armenian-Turkish relations without the traditional demand that Istanbul recognize the Armenian Genocide of 1915. In case of improvement of bilateral relations, opening of borders and restoration of old economic routes, the eastern regions of Türkiye, and also Armenia, can benefit economically.[13] Armenian-Turkish relations, in turn, can influence the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and its subsequent resolution. In Prague, talks were also held between Nikol Pashinyan and Ilham Aliyev in the presence of European Council President Charles Michel and French President Emmanuel Macron. As a result of the meeting, Armenia agreed to “facilitate the EU civilian mission along the border with Azerbaijan”, and Azerbaijan, on its part, “agreed to cooperate with this

mission". The EU civilian mission will start at the end of October and will last up to two months.

Normalization in the South Caucasus meets the interests of the European Union and Türkiye. Once again, Recep Erdogan will be able to demonstrate his role as a mediator between the hostile parties in the international arena, consolidate regional influence and achieve economic benefits. Before the summit, Turkish diplomats emphasized Türkiye's role as an important intermediary. For its part, the European Union will expand its influence in the region, which has long been dominated by the Russian Federation, and in the future may hope to use the South Caucasus to transport energy resources from Central Asia and potentially from Iran. In this case, Emmanuel Macron would get the first substantial result within the framework of the new initiative, while supporting the traditional partner—Armenia, a country facing an extremely challenging situation, as Yerevan currently has no powerful allies in its confrontation with Azerbaijan, which is backed by Türkiye.

In this case, the Russian Federation loses influence in the South Caucasus, where it has traditionally used ethnic tensions and internal rivalry between post-Soviet states to strengthen its power in the region of its former empire.

An important aspect for the implementation of Emmanuel Macron's initiative will be the further involvement of the UK. Before the summit, there were doubts about the participation of Liz Truss. These doubts were the result of traditional British skepticism about participation in European political projects and controversial issues and tensions between the UK and the EU after Brexit, as well as between the UK and France. There are many such controversial issues: for example, the crossing of migrants through the English Channel, fishing in the Channel, the creation of AUKUS and Australia's rejection of French submarines. In the spring, London and Paris resolved the fishing dispute after a sharp tension around this issue at the end of last year. After that, Boris Johnson stressed the high importance of relations between France and the UK, which added optimism about the prospects for further cooperation between the two countries. However, Liz Truss adhered to a tougher rhetoric. During the election debate, when asked about Emmanuel Macron, she said that "the jury is out" on whether Macron is a friend or foe of Britain, and she will judge him "by his actions, not his words."<sup>[14]</sup>

Relations with the European Union may deteriorate over the Northern Ireland Protocol. Liz Truss expressed a desire to find a solution through negotiations with the EU, however, she is ready to act unilaterally,<sup>[15]</sup> if a common decision is not found.



In the end, Liz Truss accepted the invitation and took part in the inaugural summit, and the fact that the third summit was held on the territory of Albion may indicate that the UK took the new initiative seriously and may hope to use the format of the European Political Community to achieve its own foreign policy objectives. In the UK, the new format is proposed to be called the European Political Forum, which generally corresponds to its essence.

In addition to the negative aspects of the British-French and European-British relations, there are also those that unite them. First of all, it is Russian aggression and support for Ukraine. In view of Germany's restrained position on the new format, London, together with Paris, can become a driving force behind Emmanuel Macron's initiative and contribute to its realization. At the same time, positive dynamics in relations with European countries is critical for the implementation of the grand strategy of "Global Britain". To counter Russia and China at the same time, the UK needs allies, and a platform for developing a common policy on the European continent can help accelerate the settlement of other issues. Proof of this is the meeting of Emmanuel Macron and Liz Truss in Prague and the agreement to hold the next Franco-British summit in France in 2023 "to advance the renewed bilateral agenda". In addition, the parties discussed the deepening of their cooperation, particularly in the energy sector,[16] agreed to extend collaboration in the field of illegal migration, which is a matter of principle for the British government, and to put an end to unsafe crossings of the English Channel.

Along with the issues of convergence of foreign policy of the EU and neighboring states and security issues, one of the main topics at the summit in Prague was the issue of energy. Azerbaijan, Israel and Cyprus can become major suppliers in this regard. Even before the summit, the President of Azerbaijan announced the country's intention to double the capacity of the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline TANAP, which supplies gas to Europe through Türkiye, up to 32 billion cubic meters. According to Aliyev, this requires significant steps—political decisions, technical measures and, of course, investments." [17] The EU signed a trilateral agreement with Israel in June, also involving Egypt. The agreement provides for increased gas production by Israel and its transportation through Egypt, where the blue fuel will be liquefied for further transportation to Europe. Cyprus, in turn, is a small country and consumes little gas with significant offshore production. In the future, the country will be able to export gas to Europe, although there are still questions about the relevant infrastructure. In addition, a negative factor is the political contradictions with Türkiye, which claims fields in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Furthermore, one should not dismiss the prospect of building the EastMed gas pipeline from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe. This is a large-scale project and its implementation has been debated for years without any results. However, in the new conditions, the EU may approach this idea in a different way.

Ukraine is interested in increasing gas supplies from other countries to Europe. Among the countries that have already partially replaced Russian exports on the continent is Norway. In September, Poland completed the Baltic Pipe project according to the schedule and now imports Norwegian gas. For Ukraine, the strategic interest lies in the construction of a gas interconnector, which will make it possible to purchase gas from Norway, as well as American liquefied natural gas. It is worth noting that the Baltic Pipe is part of a large-scale North-South gas project, which, in contrast to Russian pipes, will create an alternative gas supply system in the region of Central and Eastern Europe from Croatia to Poland.[18] Becoming part of this system is a big task for the Ukrainian leadership.

For its part, Ukraine can become a major supplier of electricity in Europe. After the synchronization of Ukraine's energy system with the ENTSO-E network of continental Europe, Ukrainian electricity exports to Europe increased by 2.5 times.[19] However, due to the armed Russian aggression, Ukraine cannot realize its export potential in full.

## CONCLUSIONS

Under the current conditions on the European continent, Russia's war against Ukraine and in the context of global geopolitical confrontation, French President Emmanuel Macron is trying to strengthen the role of the EU as a subject of international politics and a means of promoting French national interests.

If implemented, the European Political Community can become a tool for deepening cooperation between the EU and other European countries, in particular those that intend to become EU members in the future. The prospect of membership and participation in EU programs has not become a sufficient incentive for internal reforms in the candidate and partner countries. Thus, the security belt around the EU, which would consist of stable democratic or hybrid regimes, has not been created. The President of France put forward his initiative to enhance the security and stability of the European continent through the convergence of foreign policy of the EU and other countries of the continent. The informality of the organization and holding of summits at the highest level can be a factor contributing to the effectiveness of the new format, because the decision-making process will depend not on bureaucratic procedures, but on the solutions adopted by the leadership of the states. At the same time, the non-participation in the new format of the G7 countries—the U.S., Canada and Japan, as well as democratic Asian states such as Australia and South Korea, may limit the effectiveness of the initiative. In Washington, the absence of an invitation to participate in the summit of the new format will not cause concern, but rather the opposite. Europe's ability to respond to existing threats on its own is consistent with the United States' strategy of sharing responsibilities among partners.

Macron sees the European Political Community as a step towards the realization of the idea of European sovereignty. Within this format, he will try to promote the French vision of the European political system. The French President has support from Brussels and a mandate from the French people. Even the fact of losing positions within his country will not change the general foreign policy course of Emmanuel Macron. In the last elections, the pro-presidential bloc "Together" (in French — "Ensemble") did not receive a majority in the parliament. Out of the required 289 mandates, "Ensemble" received only 245.[20] Despite this, the likelihood of forming an opposition alliance that would influence Macron's foreign policy is currently low. Furthermore, in matters of foreign and security policy, the president's powers, formally shared with the government, remain supreme, and the National Assembly and the Senate, which oversee major international policies, rarely have the power to block the president's decisions. The parliament was not called upon to express its opinion on the sending of weapons to Ukraine, nor on France's foreign operations, notably in the

Sahel, in the Middle East as part of the coalition against ISIS or in Afghanistan. That is, despite the loss of positions in the domestic political arena, Emmanuel Macron's foreign policy vector will remain unchanged.

It is important that the initiative is endorsed by the European Commission. After the full-scale Russian attack, Brussels demonstrates a leading position in the coordination of European policy, so the initiative of the European Political Community should be taken seriously.

Further success of the new format depends in particular on the willingness of powerful partner countries to participate in it. This applies to the UK. The leadership of the state expressed some skepticism before the summit, but eventually it was announced that the third summit would be held in the UK, and the talks between Liz Truss and Emmanuel Macron inspire optimism in the further dynamics of bilateral relations and cooperation within the new format.

Ukraine has much to offer Europe. This refers to the energy sector, export of Ukrainian electricity, as well as security and defense. The transition to allied relations with the EU countries is currently hindered by a number of factors, one of the main ones being the reluctance and fear of a number of states to be drawn into the war with Russia. Nevertheless, it is necessary to propose a vision of the post-war security architecture right away.

The best allies are those countries that have the most similar perception of threats and ways to address them. The vision of Ukraine and Western European countries, especially France, on Russian aggression is still different. This is contrasted with the perception of threats and ways of counteracting them by Eastern European countries. The vision of Eastern European countries is as close as possible to the Ukrainian one, therefore, deepening relations with the EU, actual integration with the EU states and anchoring their strategic interests in Ukraine will contribute to the realization of Ukraine's interests. One of the main assets of Ukraine is its army. Sovereign Europe is unthinkable without the ability of Europeans to use hard power. In this regard, it is worth introducing Zbigniew Brzezinski's geopolitical model of the critical core of Europe's security into the discourse. Thus, among the possible developments of security architecture on the continent, the geopolitician suggested the possible formation of the Paris-Berlin-Warsaw-Kyiv axis. Currently, there is a certain polarization between Eastern Europe and Western Europe, as well as tensions between Poland and Germany, which may make the proposed model seem unpromising. However, if the EU and its member states are serious about creating a "sovereign Europe," they must first harmonize policies within the union. Given the process of

rearmament of the German, Polish and Ukrainian armies, the idea of a critical core of Europe is worth being spread and further discussed at academic conferences and in government cabinets—particularly at the upcoming summits of the European Political Community. Special relations between Ukraine and the UK and Poland and the UK would balance the continental power of European states. Moreover, such an initiative with the participation of Ukraine would be positively perceived by Washington. Firstly, the cessation of the polarization process in the EU would lead to the strengthening of the Union, and secondly, the enhancement of the EU’s military capabilities would contribute to the implementation of the United States’ strategy of responsibility sharing with partner countries.

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**Author:**

Bohdan Ivashchenko

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**Centre for International Security**

Kombinatna str. 25, office 146A

Kyiv, 02002, Ukraine

Phone.: +380976566675, +380504712575

Email: [cntr.bezpeky@gmail.com](mailto:cntr.bezpeky@gmail.com)

<https://intsecurity.org/>

