Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The UK has breathed life into the European Political Community, but the forum still has intractable problems

The UK elections and the formation of the Labour government just before the European Political Community summit have breathed meaning into this young European platform, which has been struggling to create its own identity since day one.

Relations between the UK and the EU were a major and important topic for the participants at the Blenheim summit, giving it a much-needed dose of substance given the expectations from the new Labour government in London.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer, hosting a meeting of more than 45 European leaders, took the opportunity to reaffirm his government's intention to strengthen ties with the EU and even mentioned their "reset."

Some participants responded positively to this, such as Finnish President Alexander Stubb, who said, "Britain is back in Europe!" The outgoing head of EU diplomacy, Josep Borrell, also used the term "reset" to describe relations with the UK.

However, most other guests were cautious about the far-reaching implications of the Oxfordshire meeting, at least when it comes to the rapid redefinition of EU-UK relations.

How to survive the consequences of Granada?

One of the reasons, if not the primary one, is that the first meeting of nearly all European leaders with the new UK PM is taking place in an environment that is not quite ready to host major political events.

Last year's summit in Granada, Spain, was a major test for the newly established forum, which was in its third session. The participants parted in a rather turbulent atmosphere, as none of the developments at the core of the EPC at the time materialised.

On the final day of the summit in Spain, all eyes were already focused on 2024, with the British hosts seen as the saviours of the new forum of European political leaders due to its initial stumbles

The summit did not discuss the crisis between Azerbaijan and Armenia because key figures such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Azerbaijani head of state Ilham Aliyev were absent. The summit in Spain did not address the crisis in the Balkans between Serbia and Kosovo, as Albin Kurti, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, was also absent.

The cancellation of the joint press conference at the summit's end, as well as the failure to issue the final declaration, contributed to the overall disastrous outcome of the summit in Granada.

On the final day of the summit in Spain, all eyes were already focused on 2024, with the British hosts seen as the saviours of the new forum of European political leaders due to its initial stumbles.

The biggest impact of the summit

Prime Minister Starmer and his government will undoubtedly meet these expectations, given that they are new to the game and that most European leaders want to understand first-hand Britain's plans for complex relations in Europe.

It will turn out that this could be the ultimate reach of the summit at Blenheim Palace. Keir Starmer has set an inspiring agenda for participants, with support for Ukraine taking centre stage, as well as discussions on migration and energy.

These really are critical European issues for all EPC participants, regardless of whether they are part of the EU or not.

However, the EPC summit will not have greater political reach this year either, through no fault of its own. First, the central security issues, which certainly focus on Ukraine and the impact of Russian aggression on Europe's security, were already at the heart of the discussion at the recently concluded NATO summit in Washington.

The majority of European leaders came to the UK already "consumed" by NATO decision-making and have nothing new to offer to the EPC framework.

> Handicap for the EPC is that the timing of its summit coincides with major political shifts in many of Europe's most influential democracies

An even bigger handicap for the EPC is that the timing of its summit coincides with major political shifts in many of Europe's most influential democracies.

Ursula von der Leyen was not present at the summit, as she naturally wanted to prioritise attending the meeting of the new convocation of the European Parliament, in which she was to be elected for the next mandate as President of the European Commission.

Turkey's head of state, Erdoğan, also did not come to the UK, citing a "hectic travel schedule" as the reason for his absence. President Erdoğan only attended the first summit of this forum in Prague in 2022, but he skipped the next two and now the third meeting of European leaders.

It is clear that Erdoğan does not attach significant political importance to the EPC meetings, regardless of the fact that the principal ideas for launching this platform include Turkey as one of the most important participants. These include, above all, ensuring European security, maintaining a stance against Russian aggression against Ukraine, and minimizing supply risks.

The legitimacy of the EPC founders has been undermined

A decisive handicap for this year's EPC summit is the fact that its initiator, French President Emmanuel Macron, will come to the meeting with many scars from the recent parliamentary elections.

Macron, a figure who has encouraged the creation of a broad European dialogue bloc, particularly as a place to strengthen cooperation between EU members on the one hand and non-EU states on the other, will come with limited leadership legitimacy.

Since Hungary is the next summit organiser, concerns about its future will begin the day after the UK summit - Viktor Orbán

His shaky internal position, regardless of the fact that he will remain in the saddle for participation in the new parliamentary majority and government, inevitably reflects on the credibility of the EPC, a forum of which Macron was the initiator.

Since Hungary is the next summit organiser, concerns about its future will begin the day after the UK summit. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán already proved that he will not be playing as part of the team when he took office as President of the European Union on July 1, because in just a few weeks, he has terrified his partners from the bloc with visits to Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and Donald Trump.

With all it has endured since its establishment two years ago, after the UK summit and the

temporary maintenance of its mission, the European Political Community is thus entering a phase in which its identity crisis will be confronted with Hungary's open scepticism as the organiser of a new pan-European meeting.