

Moldova to Host the EPC Summit: A Little Country on a Big Stage

Written by Wilder Alejandro Sánchez

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WILDER ALEJANDRO SÁNCHEZ, MAY 16 2023

The Republic of Moldova will host the 2nd Summit of the European Political Community (EPC) on 1 June, putting the European nation on the international center stage. While the EPC is a new organization finding its path in the veritable alphabet soup of regional organizations that already exist across Europe, hosting this Summit is essential for Chisinau and Moldovan President Maia Sandu. In the future, this Summit can be viewed as an example of Moldova's pro-European foreign policy as long as the meeting is remembered for all the right reasons.

The EPC was created in 2022 as a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. French President Emmanuel Macron first proposed the Community during a May 2022 conference, and on 23-24 June 2022, the formation of the Community was approved by the European Council. On 6 October, 2022, the EPC met for the first time in Prague, Czech Republic, with 44 states in attendance. "The European Political Community is a platform for political coordination between European countries across the continent," explains the website of the 2022 Czech presidency of the European Union; the EPC is aimed at promoting "political dialogue and cooperation on issues of common interest in order to strengthen the security, stability and prosperity of the European continent." So far, the Community's participants include all 27 EU members, other countries located in the European subcontinent (including Türkiye), and Armenia, Azerbaijan & Georgia. Only Russia and Belarus have not been invited to participate.

A 19 October 2022 commentary by Dr. İlke Toygur for the Center for European Policy Studies explains, "Right now, the EPC is like a white canvas to be painted on. It could become a rather loose coordination platform – or a talking shop as many claim it will morph into ... or it could become an entirely new set-up that may lead to a certain degree of policy harmonisation in specific fields." Dr. Toygur added that for the time being, "the EU-centricness of the initiative," including links with the European Council Presidencies, the European Commission and the European External Action Service "will guarantee that harmonisation is aligned with the EU's priorities." Hopefully, the upcoming Moldovan summit will include the creation of a short and medium-term strategy for the organization.

According to Chisinau, the EPC will gather representatives from 47 nations, not to mention representatives from European and other institutions. European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission Head Ursula von der Leyen are expected to attend the Summit, informs Radio Moldova. A post on the Summit's Facebook page notes, "Moldova will host not only the 50 presidents, prime ministers and EU officials invited, but also hundreds of foreign journalists." No agenda has been publicly released, but the Summit's website explains that the Summit will focus on joint efforts for peace and security, energy resilience and climate action, and interconnections in Europe.

On 27 April, President Sandu gave a speech and explained that this meeting is "a symbolic moment that represents both international recognition for our country and a huge responsibility." She added that on the agenda is:

The future of the Republic of Moldova, as a European state that has chosen its path firmly in the EU... We want to be an integral part of the European market, to sell more and more Moldovan products in EU countries, to connect to the European transport network so that Moldovans can travel easier, cheaper, and faster. We want to contribute to a better-connected and more stable Europe.

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Regarding what impression she wants her government and compatriots to show their guests, President Sandu explained, “the whole world will have the opportunity to see us as we are: humane, open-hearted... free-thinking and respectful towards those around us, disciplined and confident in the future of our country.” The Moldovan head of state also noted, “we will say these things openly on 21 May at the Moldovan European Assembly,” referring to an upcoming rally she is organizing in Chisinau. (I have written about this Summit for e-IR, “Moldova’s Sandu Seeks Support for a Pro-EU Path”).

During a late March visit to Moldova, European Council President Charles Michel met with President Sandu. Among the topics of discussion was the EPC summit. President Michel remarked, “it’s particularly significant that [the Summit] will take place here in Chişinău. I am absolutely confident that it will be a successful summit.” In other words, Brussels is openly supporting Moldova for this upcoming meeting.

As for the location of the Summit, it will occur in Mimi Castle, Bulboaca, in the Anenii Noi District, around 35 km from Chisinau. Moldovan security services will undoubtedly be tested to their limit given the dozens of high-profile delegations that will arrive in the country. Moldova’s Media Group for Security News (Grupul Media pentru Ştiri de Securitate: GMSS-CPE) has reported that “all civil aircraft flights will be prohibited in the entire airspace” of Moldova, between “1 June at 00:00 (local time) until 2 June at 07:00 (local time), with the exception of official aircraft.”

Hosting the Summit means Sandu will control the agenda, incite discussion on specific issues, and propose resolutions about issues important to Moldova – e.g., energy security, financial aid to increase the Moldovan military’s capacity, and help with Ukrainian refugees in Moldova. The fact that energy security has been disclosed as a topic is no surprise, given Moldova’s energy security challenges. “European countries will not abandon the Republic of Moldova under any circumstances. Peace and democracy in our country will be protected,” said President Sandu in her 27 April address. “For us, it is an opportunity to show that we are a peaceful, hardworking, and dignified people, aligned with European values,” she added. President Sandu, Prime Minister Dorin Recean, Foreign Affairs Minister Nicu Popescu, and other senior officials must ensure that the eventual “Declaration of Chisinau” or “Declaration of Bulboaca,” is meaningful and has long-lasting repercussions so that the Summit of Moldova is remembered and cited in the future.

The EPC presents opportunities for the Moldovan government. For the Sandu presidency, a successful summit will improve the country’s international image. The country gained candidate status for the European Union last June 2022; hence the meeting is an ideal platform for Moldovan authorities to stress that the country remains committed to becoming an EU member. If there is robust attendance for the 21 May Rally, and the EPC summit ends with a noteworthy declaration and separate agreements with the Moldovan government, the Sandu presidency would have enjoyed back-to-back political, diplomatic, and PR wins at the domestic and international levels.

Moldova’s complicated political system must be mentioned, as the pro-Moscow Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (*Partidul Socialiştilor din Republica Moldova*: PSRM) and the Sor Party continue to organize anti-Sandu protests (as recently as Sunday, 7 May). In addition, a group called the Movement for the People “Mişcarea Pentru Popor” has announced its intention to organize a rally on 21 May, parallel to President’s Sandu rally. The organization includes the Şor Party, the Renaissance Party, the Centrist Union, unaffiliated deputies, the Salvagardare Association, and PSRM representatives, the SOR party announced on 4 May. There is no word yet if these parties will organize rallies or protests during the EPC summit, but this possibility should be monitored.

Given the ongoing war in Ukraine and the fact that the EPC is still a very young organization, it is too soon to properly assess and predict what the EPC is capable of becoming. Nevertheless, the Summit is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that geographically small Moldova – but a country with a big heart, as a documentary describes the nation – can host a high-profile conference during tumultuous times. Moreover, Sandu will likely utilize this opportunity to remind the dozens of leaders and delegations in attendance about her country’s pro-Europe orientation and challenges.

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Wilder Alejandro Sánchez is President of Second Floor Strategies, a consulting firm in Washington, D.C. He covers geopolitical, defense, and trade issues in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Western Hemisphere. He has monitored Moldovan affairs for over a decade: he co-authored a chapter on the Transnistria separatist problem for the book *Separatism and Regionalism in Modern Europe*, while a journal essay on Moldova's Gagauzia region is scheduled to be published this year.