

WHY THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL COMMUNITY IS A GOOD IDEA

On 24 February Russia launched a brutal invasion of Ukraine. This unprecedented and unjustified war has served as a wake-up call for Europe. It is an attack on the international legal order, and as such it constitutes a threat to our own freedom and security. We have suddenly woken up to the realisation that the notion of peace on our continent cannot be taken for granted. This is a game changer.

President Putin hoped to sow division between the countries of Europe, but in fact, he achieved the opposite. We stand united. Not just the members of the EU, but all European countries.

We will do everything in our power to help Ukraine regain its full sovereignty and territorial integrity, and we will support its reconstruction. But the fact is that Russia's unprovoked aggression against one of its neighbours also forces us all to rethink some fundamentals, about this continent we all share and about how best to protect our democracy and common values. The need for a strong, ongoing, united European response is self-evident. That is why we fully support President Macron's proposal for a European Political Community (EPC).

The EPC should be a place where all democratic European countries can discuss common concerns and challenges and devise concrete solutions. It should be driven not by bureaucracy, but by flexibility. It should be guided not by fixed agendas, but by pressing issues that concern us all, such as the war in Ukraine, energy and food security. We need a platform that does not overlap with the strong regional organisations we already have in Europe and does not supplant the well-structured process of EU accession for candidate countries. The EPC should be a workspace where we can meet and do business, whether you are a member of the EU or not.

We are very much looking forward to our first meeting in the beautiful city of Prague on 6 October. And we strongly believe there is an important and ambitious agenda to discuss right from the start.

On energy, we see the great potential for expanding and integrating our continent's energy and transport networks. In the EPC we can discuss how to work towards an interconnected and climate-neutral energy system in Europe. Prioritising investment in the production of energy in Europe will further help to ensure Europe's full independence from Russian energy exports. Of course, in the short term all European countries should work to devise response mechanisms for addressing the rise in energy prices.

The climate crisis is one of the biggest challenges we face. We can see this every day across the continent. We need to coordinate our measures, including those related to the ambition expressed at Glasgow's COP26 to double adaptation finance for developing countries.

Another major challenge is cybersecurity. All our countries face cyber threats which pose a major danger. Together we should increase our collective cyber resilience by working together to secure our institutions and networks.

Beyond these challenges we must also invest in a positive agenda for our common future. First and foremost this means investing in young people. This is why we need to discuss pan-European higher education, research and innovation capabilities, competitiveness and sustainability – and do so sooner rather than later. We must continue to promote exchanges involving young people and cooperation between universities. And we can use the EPC to share best practices in this area.

Finally, we should also discuss how to improve intra-European trade. We need a robust framework for economic growth and social convergence for all parts of Europe. It's crucial that we support regional and sub-regional economic cooperation initiatives and invest in regional transport and trade connectivity.

Europe must shape its own future, and the only way to do that is to work together as democratic members of the European family. Working together makes us stronger, safer and more prosperous. So, in Prague, let us establish a forum that is inclusive and effective in addressing these various issues. You can count on us to help achieve this.

Edi Rama, Prime Minister of Albania

Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the Netherlands