



Summitry: the Increasingly Frequent Meetings of European Leaders

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Summary

High-level meetings between leaders of states, governments and international organisations – often called ‘summits’ – have never been more frequent. In the European Union, the Lisbon Treaty (2009) institutionalised the European Council that had long met without any constitutional basis; it now has legal authority to set guidelines for future steps in European integration and it has been a crucial locus for resolving the crises of the post-Lisbon years.

But this is far from the only forum in which they meet. Many international organisations such as NATO and the Council of Europe hold ad hoc summits to solve particular problems. The term is also used to give a solemn character to other bilateral or multilateral meetings of different kinds: regional, transcontinental, or relating to particular policy areas. Some international bureaucracies live in symbiosis with particular summits, such as the OECD/G24 and indeed the European Commission and the European Council.

This survey, by the former Secretary General of the Council of Europe, considers the proliferation of summits in recent decades, and how the meetings differ regarding their preparation, attendance, follow-up and impact. The paper goes on to set out some as yet unanswered questions about the effects of this proliferation on governance and policymaking.

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The opinions expressed in the publication are those of the author.

1. Introduction

We see them smiling on family photos, a proud host or hostess in the middle. A fortnight later the cameras will catch the same familiar faces beaming somewhere else. European leaders are not only gregarious—shaking hands in many different settings, engaging in speed meetings with their many colleagues and constituencies—but their contacts have also become increasingly international. In recent decades, they have begun to move in ever wider circles, frequently crossing borders to meet their opposite numbers in other countries. With a retinue of close advisers and journalists, supreme leaders step in and out of airplanes, chasing from one prestigious venue to another. A growing fraction of the calendars of these leaders is devoted to international affairs. But summits outside Europe are also on the rise. In many networks including the G20 there seems to be a gradual tipping of the balance from Western predominance to the Global South.

Statecraft has become peripatetic. Today's leaders are much more engaged in cross-border concerns than yesterday's. Summits are no longer exceptional events but occur at least every month. International working parties are constantly in operation in a wide spectrum of areas, and specialised ministers meet on a regular basis. At the pinnacle of these encounters we see the heads of state and government getting together to find ways out of conflicts.

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Success is by no means guaranteed at these meetings, but the reports from most international deliberations tend to be up-beat. *Ritorna vincitor!* On their return from talks with their opposite numbers, most presidents and prime ministers have some good news to share with the media.

The architecture and choreography of summits vary somewhat but a few standard versions often recur. In one of them the two leaders face each other in

comfortable yet solemn-looking armchairs, perhaps in front of a fireplace. In another design the two sides are seated at opposite sides of a conference table, with the leaders in the middle accompanied by their assistants in descending hierarchical order. A third version relegates the delegations to a theatre in front of the scene.

Some summits are held on a regular basis, following well-established habits or the statutory requirements in international treaties. Others are organised ad hoc, by invitation. Given the calendar constraints of high-level politicians, the timing and practicalities are often the subject of lengthy diplomatic preparations. This does not hinder a considerable dose of last-minute modifications and improvisations. Who will ultimately come to a summit depends to a large extent on who else will be coming.

Why participate in summits? There are many reasons. The communication professionals treasure the many photo-ops provided. Though most high-level meetings merely give solemn confirmation to what has already been agreed upon in preparatory negotiations, some actually make strategic choices. Even participants carrying little weight in the decision-making process like to be seen among their powerful colleagues. Occasionally there are also real opportunities to wield influence, or useful side meetings. Even in a world of dense diplomacy there is space for personal contacts and personal chemistry between politicians.

Summits are not improvised. They are carefully prepared, often preceded by lengthy talks on the decisions to be reached: joint statements, final communiqués, declarations, agreements, memoranda of understanding, contracts or other forms of more or less binding obligations. Sometimes sherpas have been hard at work. As the meeting starts there will frequently be an agreed text with longer or shorter passages in brackets, indicating issues where agreement remains to be reached: leaders are often called upon to crack only the hardest nuts and add glamour at the presentation of results. But if consensus cannot be attained there will sometimes be some form of 'chairman's conclusions'. Conventions may be reduced to recommendations or split into several parts, with controversial elements saved for later occasions.

The issues to be dealt with at summits are normally determined beforehand, but the best-laid plans will often fall victim to unforeseen developments. Acute concerns may force their way into the agenda. A meeting intended to deal with a particular situation or problem may be absorbed by entirely different matters. Timetables frequently turn out to be optimistic. As leaders head home, final items often remain to be sorted out at a lower level, or a subsequent meeting.

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Although the term ‘summit’ entered the language of international diplomacy in 1950, through a speech by Winston Churchill in Edinburgh, summitry is not a recent invention. Ancient historians mention several meetings between leaders of Greek city states and between Greeks and Persians. The leaders of Germanic tribes met to discuss the struggles against Scots and Picts. Legendary meetings engaged world power leaders for weeks and months: the 1645–1648 Westphalian peace conference, the 1814–1815 Vienna Congress, the 1878 Berlin conference which carved up Africa, the 1919 Versailles peace conference and the 1944–1945 high-level conferences in Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam.

The form and duration of high-level contacts have however evolved dramatically with the revolutionary changes in logistics. With the participants moving by ship or train, these expeditions required long spells of absence from the respective capitals. Air transport then facilitated shorter and more frequent encounters. A recent development is the emergence of digital conferences, given a strong push by COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2022. A related innovation is the hybrid format, combining the physical presence of some interlocutors with the big- or small-screen involvement of other participants. As such meetings were not provided for in any rules of procedure, they have so far been qualified as informal.

This survey looks into the formats of leaders’ meetings inside or outside the common European organisations. It also raises a number of questions about power shifts that may have occurred through the proliferation of summits.

2. Summits Everywhere

This section lists the many configurations in which European leaders today meet with each other and with their counterparts around the world. It then considers some key aspects of such summits: procedure, logistics and the safety of participants.

2.1 A proliferation of summits

The European Council

The European Council of the heads and state and government started out as an informal body, convened for the first time in 1961 and then several times at irregular intervals in the 1960s. The Copenhagen summit in December 1973 made a provision for summits to be held whenever necessary, and the next step towards institutionalisation was taken at the subsequent Paris meeting a year later. It was then agreed that it would be useful to have a regular forum for discussions between the heads of state or government and the following summit was held at Dublin Castle.

The push for these meetings came essentially from states that wished to move forward with deeper European integration. Before the Lisbon Treaty there were no formal rules about the shape and functions of the European Council, but its growing impact was noted by many scholars. Wolfgang Wessels (2016) lists the following descriptions:

- ‘supreme political institution’ (Giscard d’Estaing)
- ‘supreme political authority of the EU’ (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace)
- ‘single decision-making centre’ (Tindemans)
- ‘informal centre of the big, strategic decisions’ (Van Rompuy)
- ‘provisional European Government’ (Monnet)
- ‘European government’ (Fischer, Gillissen)

- ‘institutionalization of power at the heart of the European polity’ (Foret and Rittelmeyer)
- ‘highest decision-making body’ (Van Middelaar)
- ‘principal decision-maker’ (De Schoutheete and Micossi)
- ‘the highest power centre within the Union’ (Zielonka)
- ‘overall political leadership on all EU affairs’ (Piris)
- ‘new centre of gravity’ (Puetter)
- ‘top executive power’ (De Schoutheete and Micossi)
- significant actor in a ‘post democratic executive federalism’ (Habermas).

With the Lisbon Treaty, the European Council was finally formally formalized and a regulatory framework was laid down for its meetings. According to Article 15:1 of the Treaty on European Union, the European Council ‘shall provide the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and shall define the general political directions and priorities thereof’ but it ‘shall not exercise legislative functions.’

The European Council consists of ‘the Heads of State or Government of the Member States, together with its President and the President of the Commission’. The role assigned to the heads of state should not be taken too literally: the monarchies are represented by their prime ministers accompanied by either the foreign ministers or the ministers for Europe, and the former take precedence at the meetings of the European Council.

Apart from the national representatives and the President of the Commission, invitees often include the European Central Bank and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. When the agenda so requires, the European Council may decide that the members be assisted by the relevant ministers and, in the case of the President of the Commission, by a member of the Commission.

At the sub-summit level, a variety of practices have developed in different areas. Apart from the formal Council meetings governed by the Treaty, there is also a variety of firmer or looser traditions. As a case in point: informal meetings of the foreign ministers are hosted twice a year by the countries holding the rotating presidency of the Council. The first such event was held at Schloss Gymnich in North Rhine-Westfalia in 1974, and the name has stuck. The code at these meetings is for ministers to take part on their own, with no assistants present.

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The Eurogroup and Euro summits

The Eurogroup meetings started out as informal encounters between the Euro country finance ministers, normally on the day before the formal Ecofin Council which brings together finance ministers from all member states. Amid considerable criticism of this opaque form of governance, French President Sarkozy proposed the organisation of regular summits involving the heads of state or government and the Presidents of the Commission and the European Central Bank – ‘Euro summits’. Sarkozy claimed that only these leaders had the necessary democratic legitimacy for the task. The first of these meetings was held in October 2008 in response to the debt crisis. In October 2011 it was decided to hold such meetings at least twice a year, and the following year this principle was formalized in the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union. It was also decided that a Euro summit president would be elected, separate from the Euro Group president. The ‘at least twice-a-year’ target has often been missed: in 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2017. In other years, up to five meetings have been held in response to acute concerns. Regular Euro summits have taken place at the sidelines of the European Council, at the end of its second day.

The Council of Europe

No summit is foreseen in the Statute of the Council of Europe where the supreme decision-making competence belongs to the Committee

of Ministers, meeting in principle twice a year. Instead of the foreign ministers member states may send their ministers for Europe, or any other representative. The ambassadors, based as a rule permanently in Strasbourg and attending the weekly meetings of this governing body, act as the deputies of their ministers.

Summits have been convened four times in the history of the organisation. When the fourth meeting was held in May 2023, focusing on solidarity with Ukraine, it was 18 years since a summit had taken place in the framework of the Council of Europe. With rare exceptions, these summits have been attended by all heads of state and government.

The first summit took place in Vienna in October 1993, after the fall of the Berlin wall and the beginning of the democratic transition in central and eastern Europe. It confirmed the Council's policy of enlargement and also launched the reform of the European Convention on Human Rights paving the way for the fusion of the Commission of Human Rights with the Court of Human Rights with full-time judges in Strasbourg. The Heads of State and Government presented the Council of Europe as the guardian of democratic security based on the recognition and defence of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The second summit was held in Strasbourg on 10–11 October 1997, with participation of all member states and candidate countries. It adopted an action plan to strengthen the Council's activities in the promotion of democracy and created the role of Human Rights Commissioner to intervene more actively against violations of the obligations undertaken by the member states. It also underlined the need to promote social cohesion and cultural diversity.

The third summit took place in Warsaw on 16–17 May 2005. Leaders of the 46 member states redefined the Organisation's priorities by adopting a political declaration on the principal tasks of the Council of Europe in the coming year. Again, there was much emphasis on the need to defend the rule of law in all member states.

The fourth summit, held in Reykjavik on 16–17 May 2023, focused particularly on solidarity with

Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression. The Russian Federation, a member since 1996, had recently been excluded from the organisation. To ensure its accountability for the war crimes committed, the Council of Europe decided to establish a Register of Damage caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The form chosen was that of an 'enlarged partial agreement', which means that the participation of its member states is voluntary but not compulsory and that non-member states are free to join.

The European Political Community (EPC)

The European Political Community (EPC), launched by French President Emmanuel Macron, is not yet an organisation. At its second meeting on 1 June 2023 at Mimi Castle in Moldova, it was described as a 'platform'. The participants comprise all EU member states and all other European states except Russia and Belarus. The next meeting will be held in Granada in October 2023, and the following one in London in 2024. The understanding is that there will be two meetings a year, alternating between EU member states and non-members.

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As the membership of the EPC coincides with that of the Council of Europe, the question of what value it adds may be raised. The best answer is its closer connection to the European Union which at least ten EPC members aspire to join. Though sensitive to any attempts to create half-way houses serving to postpone or avoid full accession to the EU, these states nevertheless seem to appreciate the EPC meetings—the member state hosted summits are effectively in the margins of the European Council—for providing an opportunity to partake of contacts in an EU-close setting. Alternatively,

they find it risky to be absent. For EU leaders, the EPC in conjunction with European Council meetings are a practical form of encounters since they are an 'add-on' to a structure that is already in place.

NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is governed by its Council which is permanently prepared for decisions as required. There is no provision for summits but one such meeting was held in 1957. Thereafter there was none until 1974 but since then there have been several, about one every year. Following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine the frequency has intensified; three summits were held in the spring of 2022. NATO summits have often been linked to the enlargement of the organization or to the external commitments of the organization.

OSCE

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe grew out of a sequence of negotiations that was variously called the Geneva process, the Helsinki process, or the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. As indicated by the third word in its name, it is not solely an organisation of countries *in* Europe but also *for* Europe. Thus, in this project there were from the outset not only European states but also the United States and Canada. The conflicts dealt with were initially those considered particularly burning during the Cold War, including many outstanding questions unresolved after the Second World War.

In the diplomatic negotiations preceding the Helsinki Final Act, the issues covered were divided into three baskets, security, human rights and economic cooperation. The linkages between these concerns were emphasized especially by the Western side. Great weight was given to unsettled border issues and the construction of safeguards to reduce the sense of insecurity in an area replete with military capabilities.

Eventually the centre of gravity moved to Vienna where a secretariat was established, with an operational annex in Warsaw (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR). There are no rules about regular summits but such meetings have been held in Paris 1990, Helsinki 1992, Budapest 1994, Lisbon 1996,

Istanbul 1999, and Astana 2010. By 2023, the membership had grown to 56 states.

OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development grew out of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, originally set up to administer the implementation of the Marshall plan. There are no OECD summits, properly speaking, but the organisation has made a liberal and creative use of the term for a variety of meetings. Often referred to as 'a club of mainly rich countries', the OECD has taken many steps to extend its constituency. When its work on base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) began to stir up both concerns and expectations in fiscal circles throughout the Global South, it invented an 'inclusive format' where every jurisdiction was welcome to participate. Eventually, most states took part in this effort.

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In the preparations of the annual G20 summits the OECD has served as a *de facto* secretariat, providing background materials and sometimes sketches of texts to be adopted. To avoid being seen as a voice of only the wealthy, the organisation has practiced an open door policy in many of its other activities. With at present 38 member states, there are also four candidates for accession and five key partners. The latter group includes Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and South Africa. The organisation is a veritable meetings industry with currently around 1500 events every year.

The OECD has either organised or co-organised a number of specialised top-level meetings, such as the 2013 Summit of the Global Education Industry, the 2019 Summit of the International Transport Forum, the 2021 European Social Economy Summit, the 2023 Summit on Creativity Education, several climate summits and world government summits devoted to practices in public administration, as well as leaders' meetings within the Berlin process on the Western Balkans.

UN bodies

When the UN General Assembly met in September 2023, Tuesday 19 September was set aside for the high-level General Debate. The presence of prime ministers and heads of state is carefully scheduled to allow for bilateral and other useful meetings. At irregular intervals high-level conferences are organised also by the major UN bodies, often with a particular theme. In recent years the most important of these global meetings have been the UN Climate Change Conferences (COP), the next one to be held in December 2023 (COP28).

Transcontinental summits

Summits bringing together prominent politicians from Europe and other continents are normally co-organised, with double chairmanship:

1. The 6th **European Union–African Union (EU–AU)** Summit took place on **17–18 February 2022** in Brussels, Belgium. Leaders discussed how both continents can build greater prosperity. The aim was to launch an ambitious Africa–Europe Investment Package, taking into account global challenges such as climate change and the current health crisis.

The **Africa–EU Partnership** is described as a multi-actor partnership guided by the EU and African Union (AU) Member States along with several non-state and civil society organisations, youth bodies, economic and social actors, and the private sector.

2. The 3rd summit between EU leaders and leaders from the **Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)** was organized on 17–18 July 2023, emphasizing shared values and covering a broad spectrum of policy issues. It ended with a joint declaration, adopted unanimously except by Nicaragua, focusing mainly on energy resources and the green transition. The participants committed themselves to further cooperation in the UN and other multilateral organisations. Particular attention was given to the green transition where mineral-rich Latin America may play a key role.

A first **EU–Asean summit** was held in Brussels on 14 December 2022 reaffirming the strategic partnership of the two organisations and commemorating at the same time the 45 years of

close diplomatic contacts. A joint declaration as adopted recalling the organisations' commitment to a large number of UN resolutions and sketching guidelines for future policy cooperation. Annual **EU–Japan** summits have been held since 1991.

Since 1996, meetings between Asian and European states have also been held under the auspices of Asia–Europe Meetings (**ASEM**), which is presented as an informal platform for dialogue and cooperation on a broad spectrum of challenges such as connectivity, trade, investment, climate change and cyber issues. 13 encounters within the framework of ASEM have been described as summits.

3. The latest **EU–Australia** top-level meeting was held in 2022 in Bali, in the margins of the G20 summit.
4. Several **EU–US** and **EU–Canada** summits have been held, but there is no specific organisation for these contacts outside the OSCE, the OECD and NATO. Former US ambassador to the EU Stuart Eizenstat recently proposed to establish a new transatlantic framework between the US and the EU, comparable to NATO in the economic sphere (FT 30/07/23).

In addition to the EU summits with organisations or countries in other continents, the name summit is occasionally used to underscore the importance and ambitions of national meetings with states in other continents.

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French encounters with African leaders are now and then designated as 'sommets franco-africains'. In the 1980's there were annual summits of this kind, and later they have been organised with more irregular intervals. The label has been changed from France–Afrique to Afrique–France. Russia has similar practice of inviting African leaders, though

the 2023 edition on 27 July had a markedly more restricted attendance than previous meetings.

Regional European Summits

In several parts of Europe the political heads of state and government also meet in a regional setting. Cooperation between the Benelux countries is well-established, wide-ranging and includes annual summits. The equally stable Nordic cooperation comprises regular meetings at a parliamentary level (the Nordic Council) and the governmental level (the Nordic Committee of Ministers) which is led by the prime ministers. Lower-level Nordic meetings span a wide spectrum of professions and institutions. The heads of state meet informally now and then, mainly on social occasions. An early forerunner was the 1914 meeting of the heads of states ('trekungamötet i Malmö').

Other regional groupings are of more recent origin. The Visegrad Group of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic dates back to the summit meeting of 1991. The Elysée Treaty between France and Germany was concluded at a binational summit in 1963 and then renewed with the signing of the Aachen Treaty of 2019. It served as an example for the similar Quirinale Treaty between France and Italy, signed in 2021. International cooperation in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe started before the fall of the Iron Curtain, first as the Quadragonale (Italy, Austria, Hungary, SFR Yugoslavia), then as the Pentagonale (with Czechoslovakia), then as the Hexagonale (with Poland). As the membership grew—the organisation presently comprises 16 states—the name was changed to Central European Initiative.

In the Western Balkans, there have been several initiatives. A summit for the promotion of stability in South-Eastern Europe was held in Sarajevo in 1999. From 2014, there is a Berlin process to promote the involvement of the Western Balkans states in European integration. A 9th summit of this character was convened in 2022 by Chancellor Scholz. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) came into existence with the signing of the Istanbul Summit Declaration and the Bosphorus Statement by the Heads of State and Government of the countries in the region, on 25 June 1992. Eventually it was transformed into the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The Barcelona process, initiated

in 1995, set in motion several joint projects between EU states and other countries around the Mediterranean. A summit in 2008 transformed this cooperation into the Union for the Mediterranean whose membership includes all EU member states and 14 others. Activities continue at foreign minister and working group levels but no further summit has been held.

2.2 The Politics of Protocol and Security

The proliferation of summits has raised a number of questions of procedure, logistics and the safety of participants.

Sovereigns have much to be afraid of. Leaving their protected turfs and moving into foreign territories carries its risks. In medieval Sweden, new kings were supposed to assert their authority by travelling around to collect pledges of loyalty (*Eriksgata*) but when they ventured into regions beyond their own control, noble hostages from these areas were provided for the duration of the visit. Nowadays, the bedrock of security obligations is the Vienna Convention of 1961 which places responsibility for all forms of diplomatic protection on the host country. For many states, however, such provisions in international law will not be sufficient to lay all worries to rest. National leaders' security details will also wish to make their own protective arrangements and bring along their trusted agents. The leaders of great powers arrive with their own aircraft and armoured limousines.

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Besides security, protocol offices also deal with many procedural questions. Supreme leaders and their entourages are highly sensitive to issues of *préséance* and pecking order. Some 200 European states were represented at the Vienna Congress in 1814–1815, but the five great powers (Austria, Britain, Russia, Prussia and France) played in a league of their own. In the Austrian Prime Minister's office (*Palais am Ballhausplatz*) one can still admire the meeting-room with five doors that was specially constructed for this occasion to allow

the kings and emperors to enter at exactly the same time. Who should stand where on the family photo is often, today, also carefully planned, but leaders with sharp elbows have a way of creating other facts on the ground.

Some competition for attention is intra-organisational or intra-national. In the European Union, the Presidents of the Council, the Commission and the Parliament each have their own protocol office. Frictions are not rare but they are seldom as spectacular as in the incident on 7 April 2021 dubbed ‘Sofagate’ when there were only two chairs provided for the meeting between Türkiye’s President Erdoğan, European Council President Michel and European Commission President von der Leyen, who ended up at the wall. In the Council of Europe there are occasional brushes between the Chair of the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General. One such incident occurred at the Sarajevo Summit of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe on 10 June, 1999. The brief speaking time allotted to the Council of Europe was eventually split between the two, and the declaration adopted at the meeting referred solomonically to the Representative of the Council of Europe, in the singular.

A trickier question in a few republics is the shared competence between the president and the prime minister, where the former is assigned particular weight in the conduct of foreign policy. Finland does not appear to be much troubled by this division of functions but in France the practice of *cohabitation* occasionally leads to competition. As host of the Second Summit of the Council of Europe in 1997, President Chirac pronounced the speech for France but at the subsequent press conference he shared the platform with his Prime Minister Jospin and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

3. The Implications of Summitry

Today, European leaders devote a considerable part of their working time to international meetings. A common stricture levelled at prime ministers is that they spend too much time abroad, neglecting domestic concerns. Their opponents pledge greater attention to the home front, but once in power the successors are soon

caught up in the same predicament as their predecessors. Regardless of how much they promise to focus on the worries of their national electorates, contemporary leaders cannot tear themselves away from the external challenges and the meetings which aim to find solutions.

This shift in the conduct of international affairs has attracted considerable interest among scholars of foreign policy. It is examined and discussed within many different disciplines, ranging from international law to sociology, anthropology, political science and economics. It is also interpreted as a sign, a symptom or an expression of globalisation and the transfer of sovereignty from the nation state to more elevated power centres.

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Though the discussion of summits is still in full swing, with as yet no end in sight, some possible power shifts have nevertheless been widely raised as potential consequences of this development. So far, they might best be treated as open questions:

1. *Does summitry imply a power shift towards the top?* Do the frequent meetings of supreme political leaders place diplomats, ministers, and sectoral bureaucrats off-side, giving more influence to the prime ministers and their close collaborators?
2. *What other power shifts may be occurring inside the government apparatuses?* International affairs are no longer the exclusive domain of foreign ministries. On the other hand the demand for diplomatic skills and experience is spreading out to other ministries as well. If the center of gravity in policy-making is moving upward from foreign ministers to prime ministers and heads of state, how does that impact on the balance of power within governments, and how does it affect the distribution of influence between politicians and their advisers? Is there a drift of leadership from the diplomats to the

offices of the prime ministers? And what happens to the domestic constituencies when leaders get increasingly absorbed by international affairs?

3. *Are sectoral bureaucrats sidelined by diplomats, or do they rather adapt to new conditions by acquiring new skills and turning into diplomats themselves?*

4. *Does summitry shift power from legislatures and other control bodies to the executive?* At summits, leaders may make commitments beyond their constitutional competence. An example often quoted is the pledge within NATO to spend 2 percent of GDP on defence (first made at the summit in Wales in 2014) which restricted the budgetary power of legislatures. In response to this drift of influence new practices have been adopted to hold discussions both before and after the meetings in the European Council, in parliamentary committees or the plenary.

5. *Does summitry imply a greater speed in policy diffusion across borders, with increasing information on policy successes and failures being shared?*

6. *If attention is a zero-sum commodity, does the participation of national political leaders in an ever-growing number of international meetings lead to a loss of interest in various domestic dimensions?*

7. *Does the increased practice of summitry upset the previous international balance of forces by giving more power to the great powers and institutional heavyweights?*

And there is a further set of questions relating to various nuances of summitry that may be observed, since there is as yet no established typology of international conferences.

As we have seen in this brief survey, summits come in many shapes, from the tête-à-tête or the restrained meeting between a few leaders to the Gymnich format where ministers meet on their own, with no advisors present, and the more common version which places the leaders face to face behind their flags, accompanied by a tableful of trusted advisors.

But whatever their shape, the increased frequency of top level meetings appears to be having effects on the processes of government and the products of those processes – the actual international policy outcomes – which are as yet poorly understood.

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