
GENERAL PERFORMANCE OF THE POLISH PRESIDENCY

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The Treaty of Lisbon has made the rotating Council Presidency politically irrelevant. Before December 2009, national leaders controlled the activities of the Council, and the relationship between the Council and the Parliament favoured the Council much more than after December 2009. On the one hand, under the new rules the Council has lost political weight and is now balanced in almost all its activities by the European Parliament. The European Council, on the other hand, has largely taken political clout over from the Council Presidency, as it now has its own permanent president, and there is no special role left for the rotating Presidency. On top of these things, not only have the Council powers regarding other institutions been limited, but also within the Council the rotating Presidency has been limited by the permanent chair of the Foreign Affairs Council and many of the subsidiary working parties and committees.

Because of all these limitations, the rotating Presidency is no longer a Union Presidency. If this concept was not yet fully visible before the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second semester of 2011, then the Polish experience was very telling. Poland is a larger EU member state; it was committed to the preparations for the Presidency for a number of years and had a dedicated political and administrative leadership. The Polish officials executed the Presidency effectively although they were doing it for the first time. And still, they fell short with political weight. Their leverage over the European Council was similar to every other country's leverage over the European Council. Their leverage over the Euro group was non-existent and an initiative to participate in the Euro group meeting was denied. The Poles were soldiers in the war on the crisis in the Eurozone (i.e., work they performed on the Six-Pack on economic governance), but they were not among the generals who met on 21 July 2011 at a summit of the heads of state or government of the Euro area member states.

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If the political functions of the Council Presidency have largely evaporated, the Lisbon rotating Council Presidency is in the business of law making. The legislative and administrative functions of the Council Presidency should not be underestimated. Every Council Presidency is required to deliver those public goods to the European Union. At this time of economic and political crises, ongoing dedication to difficult legislative issues is probably more important than the political ambitions of individual politicians. For those reasons, the Polish Council Presidency of the second half of 2011 needs to be considered successful.

Legislatively successful and politically marginalised, the Polish entry, however, was spectacular. There were many cultural activities all around Europe, including masterpiece exhibitions in Madrid and London and an exhibition in Brussels, ‘the Power of Fantasy’, called the best contemporary art exhibition of the year by the *Financial Times*. This wave of activities symbolised the arrival of a new actor on the European political scene. First-time Council Presidencies, after all, are for countries *maturity tests* of their presence in the European Union. The Polish Council Presidency of 2011 was such a test for Poland, and the country can be considered to have passed very well. After the Presidency, therefore, one should expect more Polish initiatives across economic, cultural, sports and political sectors.

The context

Statistically, this was the fourth Presidency from the ten countries that joined the Union seven years before. After Slovenia’s (2008, first six months) largely insignificant Presidency, the Czech Republic’s (2009, first six months) very uneven and turbulent Presidency, and the Hungarian (2011, first six months) Presidency, the Polish half-year came when the *novelty* of the newer states was no longer relevant. The older members have now experienced Presidencies managed by states ‘in the East’; there is enough experience in the region to share with the first-timers (after Poland, in 2012 Cyprus, in 2013 Lithuania, etc.), and the most important question is no longer ‘can they manage’ the Presidency business, but ‘how can they help’ to solve the multiple on-going crises. This question was particularly visible in the Polish case, as the previous Presidencies of the newer states were all low-profile ones (with the partial exception of the first two months of the Czech Presidency), and the Poles’ ambitions were high. They did not even hide that the Presidency was the country’s entrance on the scene as an EU heavyweight. Their successes or failures, or in real life the limits to their objectives, were therefore important lessons for the country to improve its position in the EU in the years ahead.

This was also the fourth Presidency under the Treaty of Lisbon rules. The treaty has politically decapitated the rotating Presidencies with the arrival of permanent chairs of the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council.

The Poles started ambitiously and with high expectations. Critical assessment, however, needs to include the double jeopardy situation of the 2011 Polish Council Presidency. The first limitation was brought about by the Treaty of Lisbon that has effectively decapitated all the Presidencies politically. A while back, Swedish diplomats were asking what the role of their prime minister was when it looked as if the new treaty was to enter into force ahead of the Swedish term in 2009. The Poles faced the situation in reality.

The second limitation was related to Poland being outside the Eurozone. None of the non-Eurozone countries can execute the ECOFIN Presidency fully, least of all at a time of profound crisis in the Eurozone. Not even if the *Financial Times* puts your national finance minister among the best in Europe, as was the case with Poland.

In this chapter, we analyse the running of the Council Presidency in the following order. First we look at the experiences of the Presidency. Then we explore the various opportunities used and success stories of the Presidency. Finally we consider the impact of the anticipated and unforeseen problems.

A kick off

The beginning of every Presidency is crucial at least from a public affairs perspective, as public attention focuses on the 'country in the main chair' for only a few weeks prior to the Presidency and a few weeks after the Presidency has begun. After the low-profile Hungarian Presidency, the Poles started with a tremendous cultural and political offensive with widely praised exhibitions across Europe and very well received speech given in the European Parliament by Prime Minister Tusk on the EU's challenges. The first institutional setback was also indicative of the country's high political ambitions. Despite not being a member of the Eurozone, the Polish finance minister was first asked to participate and then denied a seat at the meetings of the Eurogroup. Two arguments were equally solid. On the one hand, why would a Polish minister be present if Poland is outside the Eurozone? On the other hand, how can ECOFIN be effectively run and rubber stamp the Eurogroup decisions if its chairman is not in the room? For the system's swifter operational running, it would be welcomed if all rotating ECOFIN chairs

were present at Eurogroup meetings. The issue of presence at Eurogroup meetings returned like a boomerang towards the end of the Polish term (see below).

Importantly, domestic political commitment was also fully confirmed. Some Czech (2009) and Hungarian (2011) pre-Presidency experiences were negative in this respect. The lesson from Prague and Budapest seemed to be: if the partners do not know you well in advance, they will not allow you to chair meetings effectively. In order not to face the same reality, preparations for the Polish Presidency included a wide-ranging consultation programme, including a visit by the entire Polish cabinet to Brussels twelve months before the Presidency. The budget of the Presidency was not affected by austerity measures adopted in 2009 and 2010. There were more Presidency staffers than under the preceding Presidency. Also, the Presidency hired one of Brussels' top PR companies to look after expressed opinion, and Prime Minister Tusk completed a tour of European capitals before 1 July. In short, the Polish Presidency had plenty of financial and human resources to use. All of those activities aimed at overcoming the shortcomings of holding the Presidency for the first time. It turned very well since there was no criticism about the Presidency throughout the Presidency. Quite to the contrary, some expectations that were difficult to meet effectively arose.

Despite not chairing the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council, the rotating Presidency still chairs nine other Council formations. The Polish representatives were as follows:

- The Competitiveness Council mainly by Vice-PM and Minister of Economy Waldemar Pawlak;
- The Economic and Financial Affairs Council mainly by Finance Minister Jacek Rostowski;
- Justice and Home Affairs Council mainly by Justice Minister Krzysztof Kwiatkowski (*) and Interior Minister Jerzy Miller (*);
- Agriculture and Fisheries Council mainly by Agriculture Minister Marek Sawicki;
- Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council mainly by Infrastructure Minister Cezary Grabarczyk (*) and Vice-PM Pawlak (on energy, but he was replaced by one of his deputies);
- Environment Council mainly by Environment Minister Andrzej Kraszewski (*);
- Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council, depending on the specific issue, by Education Minister Katarzyna Hall (*), Higher Education

Minister Barbara Kudrycka, Culture Minister Bogdan Zdrojewski or Sport Minister Adam Giersz (*);

- Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, depending on the specific issue, by Labour Minister Jolanta Fedak, Health Minister Ewa Kopacz or Vice-PM Pawlak (on consumer affairs); and
- the horizontal General Affairs Council mainly by State Secretary Mikołaj Dowgielewicz.

[The (*) ministers were replaced following the October elections and the establishment of the second Tusk cabinet in November 2011.]

The Presidency also presided over the very influential COREPER meetings (by Ambassador Jan Tombiński at COREPER II and Karolina Ostrzyńska at COREPER I) and over 150 other lower-ranking working parties and committees. Outside the Council, the Presidency also had a parliamentary dimension. Cooperation among national parliaments of the European Union was also chaired by Poland in the second half of 2011. Within this dimension of the Presidency, there were 11 inter-parliamentary meetings of various parliamentary committees (including COSAC, energy, finance, agriculture, defence CODACC, and foreign affairs COFACC). Among the topics covered (but unsolved) was the issue of the involvement of national parliaments in the pan-European debate on European foreign policy.

General results

The official priorities for the Council proceedings were described on 38 pages of its programme. The three main headlines were economy, security and openness. Life, however, strongly redefined the priority list. The most important dossier during these six months (or, at least during its first half) turned out to be the economic governance's Six-Pack. Its successful adoption in early autumn was an important step in the EU's fight with the crisis, but it was equally important for the Presidency to show its ability to be effective. Other difficult yet important issues were the 30-year-old story of negotiating the status of European patents, the debate on the Schengen rules and the Schengen enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria, the beginning of the debate on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework, the successful adoption of the annual 2012 budget, and the horizontal issue of correlation tables.

The correlation tables aim at improving the transposition of European laws into national laws and make the process more transparent. However, for a number of years the Council and the Parliament did not agree on the shape of the correlation tables; the stalemate put on hold work on at least two other directives (on child pornography and on fruit juices). The compromise on correlation tables was finally adopted in October.

The context of each of the rotating Council Presidencies has been central for their relative successes. The same rule applied to Poland. The dire economic situation made the life of the Presidency more difficult. For that reason, when asked to mid-assess the Presidency, Europe Minister Dowgielewicz identified trust as the main challenge.¹ The on-going economic crisis has strongly challenged European integrity. However, the system is not operational if the partners (states, institutions) do not trust one another. Trust and its consequence, solidarity between EU members, are a pre-condition for any form of European integration. 'Trust is the European currency; it is the socio-political glue for the European project.'

Two other events marked the Presidency's fate. First, the emergence of the Eurozone summits as the decisive moments when the key decisions were taken on the Euro crisis overshadowed the Poles twofold. It was not only that the Presidency no longer chaired the European Council meetings, but also that the Poles were not even around the table on 21 July or 26 October, when the most important decisions were discussed. The last European Council meeting in December 2011 showed clearly that that Poles not only were unable to lead but also were equally unable to prevent the idea of a fiscal compact treaty from emerging. The proposed treaty was marginalising Poland and other non-Eurozone countries in the European Union.

The second event bounced Poland back into the leading stream of the European debate. In his speech in Berlin on 28 November 2011, the foreign minister outlined his European convictions in the following way: 'What, as Poland's foreign minister, do I regard as the biggest threat to the security and prosperity of Poland today...? It's not terrorism, it's not the Taliban, and it's certainly not German tanks. It's not even the Russian missiles that President Medvedev has just threatened to deploy on the EU's border. The biggest threat to the security and prosperity of Poland would be the collapse of the Euro zone'.² This speech has had some impact on the European debate on the future of the continent, but at the same time it had

¹ Mikołaj Dowgielewicz lecture at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) 'The Polish Presidency: A Mid-Term Assessment', 20 September 2011.

² Radosław Sikorski's speech 'Poland and the Future of the European Union' delivered at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) in Berlin on 28 November 2011.

a major impact on the perception of Poland among the German political elite. The speech was somewhat a culmination of the Poles' aspirations to voice their uncompromising pro-European feelings coupled with their emerging economy and political activity.

The opportunities used

A number of circumstances have helped Polish ambitions. First, there was a clear void in the leadership despite the appearance of a permanent chair on the European Council. In the on-going pan-European debate, the voices advocating increased integration have been limited. The strong pro-EU position of the Polish government at large and Prime Minister Tusk in particular raised the profile of Poland, and they were also important voices in the pan-European debate on the future of integration. His opening speech in the European Parliament was strongly pro-European: 'The response to the crisis is more of Europe and more of integration',³ he said. Mr. Tusk's closing speech was also well received. The highlight speech, however, was delivered by Foreign Minister Sikorski in Berlin (see above). From the beginning of the Presidency, it was widely perceived as unquestionably pro-European, which allowed it to secure a more trusting relationship with the European Parliament.

Polish pro-European sentiment is not purely idealistic, however, but deeply operational and strategic. This is widely nurtured by special ties between Poland and the EU's largest of strongholds, Germany. Warsaw-Berlin relations were so close that some officials of other EU countries informally complained that the Poles were investing too much in Germany at the expense of other states. Prime Minister Tusk and Chancellor Merkel enjoy particularly good relations and mutual trust. Prior to the Presidency, the chancellor was coming to Poland at least once a month. However, this did not change German policy that France is its main European partner. Beginning in the autumn, the Poles therefore started to invest strongly in the Weimar cooperation (Polish-French-German), especially in defence cooperation. Initially, the Presidency learned a lot from the experiences of the German Presidency. It was important for the Presidency not to be undermined by Germany when exercising the Presidency, and additional backing made life easier. This relationship, however, evolved. Beginning mid-Presidency, the Poles conveyed the message of the unity of the EU-27 in the context of the new debate

³ Donald Tusk's speech in the European Parliament, 6 July 2011.

on treaty changes and strengthening of integration. Their objective was for Berlin to include Polish views as much as possible. Results were, however, mixed. On many occasions German support was important (i.e. to lead the MAFF negotiations smoothly, to start free trade talks with Georgia, etc.), but on the key issue of the autumn of 2011 — the unity of the EU-27 — Germans remained undecided. On the one hand, without them non-Eurozone countries could probably not become parties to the fiscal compact treaty. On the other hand however, their presence was secondary.

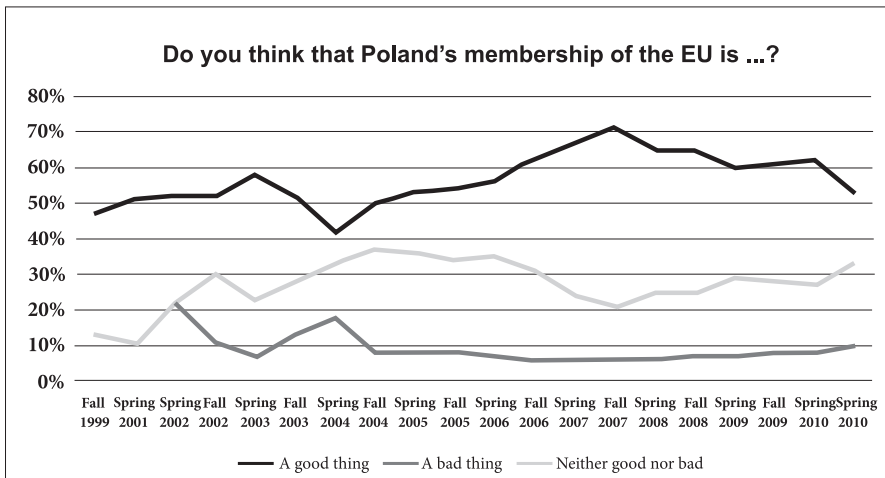
Ties were exceptionally close with Berlin, but Warsaw also enjoyed good relations with many other actors. The mostly passive Central and Eastern European nations did not follow Poland as a regional leader (as in some corners in Warsaw people like to think about Poland), but they were learning more and more to at least recognise Warsaw's regional leadership on specific issues. They rarely challenged Poland unless the Poles proved to be arrogant (see below). Additionally, the Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians were contacted in advance on many occasions. These nations together with Poland form the Visegrad Group (V4), a political forum for exchange of ideas, and at times political cooperation. Importantly, the V4 leaders usually meet ahead of the European Council meetings. Since the main role of the rotating Presidency is to be the honest broker, most Presidencies often share their national interests with their most trusted allies, so that those states will *de facto* represent the Presidency's national position at Council proceedings. In the Polish case, at least some of the V4 states received lists of issues about which Poland asked for informal representation.

Apart from Germany and the V4 group, the Poles also enjoyed good working relations with countries like Sweden (a very good relationship especially between the foreign ministers) and Denmark (within the Trio) in the Baltic Sea area and with France (as strategic partners and cooperation with the Weimar Triangle with Germany). France, however, was among the most difficult partners for Poland in running the Presidency. A strong pro-EU voice gained further support in states like Finland, Belgium and Luxembourg, traditionally supportive of the deepening of EU integration. Cooperation with Finland seemed to be effective on two accounts: in the second half of 2011 the country was emerging as a potential middle-ground broker in the area of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework, and, second, in November it dropped its veto on Schengen enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria.

The Polish dedication to European issues had been exceptional. This was the third positive development that helped them in running the Council. A great majority of the population is pro-EU (Graph 1), and the government is firmly pro-EU and supportive of EU institutions. Twelve months before the Presidency,

the entire Polish government met with the College of European Commissioners in Brussels, an event without precedent in recent history. In the first days of July, the Commission paid a return visit to Warsaw. The strong pro-European Parliament position was confirmed when Prime Minister Tusk addressed the chamber in July. The legislature’s president was a fellow Pole, Jerzy Buzek, a politician from the same party as the Polish leader. At least formally, cooperation of the two co-legislators (for most laws in the EU are decided jointly by the Council and the Parliament) was very close. An important point differentiating the European institutions from the national ones, however, is that neither President has full political control of the institutions they chair.

Graph 1. Support for European integration in Poland 1999–2010



Source: Eurobarometer

The long-standing dedication also meant that the administrative preparations for the Presidency were organised as early as two years before the event. Of some 1,200 people working for the Presidency in Brussels and Warsaw, the Polish Permanent Representation in Brussels employed up to 300 persons (Hungarian staff in the first half year numbered about 200 persons), and the budget of the Presidency was not subject to austerity cuts. In short, the Presidency was not short of staff, resources or commitment, and the question was actually about its management and effective organisation.

Another opportunity was linked to the very fact that Poles were... ambitious. Larger member states' Presidencies have usually been more ambitious and could therefore accomplish more than those of smaller nations (on the other hand, the smaller nations usually have their advantages, such as better organisational and management preparations as well as a higher degree of political commitment). Poland is a larger EU member state; by the size of its population and by the size of its economy it ranks number 6 among the 27 EU nations. However, Poland is the smallest and poorest of the larger EU nations. This meant that in order to be effective Poles could not keep preferential relations only with other larger nations and had to complement their activities with much greater engagement of mid-sized and smaller nations. The European decision-making culture means that the Presidency needs to include everybody in the room (hence, all EU states and the Commission), and the post-Lisbon focus of activities has shifted towards informal deal making with the European Parliament (since 2009 some 90% of all European laws are decided jointly with the EP and the Council).

Since the preparations were well organised and the political dedication was secured, the expectations of the Polish Presidency (as from a relatively large country) were considerably higher. The Poles did not hide their ambitions either. In effect, a positive ambience arose ahead of the Presidency. The 6 July debate in the European Parliament clearly demonstrated the opportunities and challenges ahead. For the first time in years, all major EP political groups warmly welcomed the incoming rotating Council Presidency. The European People's Party and the Socialist & Democrats Group, as well as the Liberals and the Greens, all indicated that they were pro-Council. The reason for the positive approach lies in the clearly pro-European position of the Polish government. The criticism of the prime minister came from the sidelines of European political life. Although sidelined in the European Parliament, those extreme voices became more and more influential and vocal on the local and national scenes. These developments already showed the limits of Polish aspirations, as well as equally high expectations from its partners.

The limits of ambitions

1. The Euro crisis

Positive constellations in the European sky for Poland were not, however, the only ones in the cloudy European firmament. The biggest set of risks for the Presidency was in the crisis in the Eurozone. It largely overshadowed the

Presidency, which did not use the Euro as its currency. The Presidency was not at the centre of the public debate and was not even invited to the extraordinary summit of the heads of states or governments of the Eurozone members of 21 July 2011. Surprisingly, there was a reference to the Polish Presidency in this document. At first sight it reads as a reference to an actor who should follow the summit's conclusions: 'Euro area members will fully support the Polish Presidency in order to reach agreement with the European Parliament on voting rules in the preventive arm of the [Stability and Growth] Pact'.⁴ However, another explanation is that this paragraph was illustrating not the Polish irrelevance in the Eurozone debates, but a softening of the French position on the Six-Pack. France was the main 'troublemaker' (together with some members of the European Parliament on the other side of the argument) in the timely adoption of the so-called Six-Pack. Moreover, France was causing more headaches for the Polish decision makers than any other state. This explains Poland's attempt at a greater focus on Paris from mid-Presidency well into 2012: Paris vetoed the participation of Poland's finance minister in the Eurogroup meetings, and the French delayed the Six-Pack and were the main protagonists of closer political integration within the Eurozone (without Poland).

As a consequence, since the Presidency was significantly sidelined, Poland was not among the main actors addressing the most important issues of the crisis. Their role, however, was as supportive as possible. They showed that being outside the Eurozone would not keep them silent. For example, the Euro Pact Plus adopted earlier in 2011 was initially considered a pact for the Eurozone states, and only at the request of Poland in February 2011 was the project opened up to the non-Eurozone countries. In the 2011/2012 negotiations of the fiscal compact, the Polish team also advocated openness of the document to non-Eurozone countries, tried to limit the competence of the Eurozone summits, and fought (unsuccessfully) for a seat at the table during the Eurozone summits. Both cases illustrated the political commitment of Warsaw to actively pursue solutions to the on-going and developing situations.

2. The Schengen debates

The political climate in Europe in 2011 was grim; hence there was a risk that the Polish message of optimism was not being taken seriously. Next to the difficult

⁴ Statement by the Heads of State or Government of the Euro Area and the EU Institutions, 21 July 2011, para. 13.

financial and economic situation, the future of the Schengen zone was also at stake. The EU passport-free travel area of most of the EU nations was supposed to be enlarged to include Bulgaria and Romania. While the Poles would in fact have preferred to keep the zone untouched, other nations (i.e., France, Italy and Denmark) were at times aggressively pursuing revisionist policies in the first half of the year. Hence the European debate was marked by many controversies and national popular or populist voices. The Presidency's role (in the position of chair, this time) was to maintain the Schengen rules as untouched as possible. This was achieved thanks to timing rather than active negotiations. In Denmark elections took place and since then the issue has been largely dropped. The situation somewhat normalised in Italy and France. Malta continued to be in need of assistance, but this did not require changing of the rules. On the other hand, the Schengen enlargement continued to cause problems. As happened with previous Presidencies, this issue has put the Presidency on a collision course with some other member states. There were particularly difficult relations with the Netherlands, which vetoed the Schengen enlargement together with Finland in September (the Finns later removed their veto). Polish-Dutch bilateral relations were also challenged earlier in 2011 by unfortunate developments in the Netherlands (Polish migrants ridiculed by Dutch extremists) and The Hague government's limited political flexibility, since it is dependent on the support of populist parties in the national parliament. Before the Presidency, relations with Lithuania worsened over the situation of the Polish minority in the country. Also, with the UK, the ties became strained mainly due to diverging views on annual EU budgets, EU cohesion funds, and the MAFF negotiations. During the Presidency, cooperation with both the Lithuanians and the British (on future treaty revisions) improved significantly.

3. The national elections

The difficult pan-European climate was matched by domestic affairs. Despite strong domestic support for EU membership, there was no consensus among political parties about how to run the EU Council Presidency. In recent years, two main parties have dominated Polish politics: the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO) of Donald Tusk (about 40% of support), which is a member of the European People's Party (EPP), and the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party of Jaroslaw Kaczyński (about 30% of support), which is a member

of the European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR). Two smaller parties are the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), a social democratic party that a decade ago had about 40% of support but in recent years has been largely marginalised to about 10% of public support, and the Polish People's Party (PSL), an agrarian junior ruling coalition party with about 8% of support, also a member of the EPP. The coalition parties and SLD agreed that the government running the Council Presidency should enjoy national support; hence they refrained from public criticism of the government over the Presidency. The main opposition party, PiS, was however critical of government preparations before July 2011 and presented their own vision of the Presidency's priorities.

The risks related to elections were prominent. Polish elections were scheduled for 9 October 2011, and it was constitutionally impossible to postpone them until after the Presidency. The political parties considered holding early elections in the spring of 2011, but the decision was never taken. The electoral turbulence was minimised with the electoral results. The PO won with 39.1% of public support, while the PiS result of 29.9% placed it as the main opposition party. The new Sejm created a very comfortable situation for the prime minister, whose party could choose with whom to form a new government. The PO chose its previous partner, the PSL, and in November the new government was sworn in. Some of the ministers involved in the Presidency were changed, but not the Europe minister, the foreign minister, the finance minister or the prime minister. The electoral results brought to the Sejm for the first time a new pro-European socio-liberal party, the Palikot Movement, which was supported by 10% of voters.

Apart from the risk of changing the government in the middle of the Presidency, there were two other risks related to the elections. First, there was the risk of domestic politicisation of the Presidency during the electoral campaign. This materialised only partially when the PO issued a TV advertisement arguing that only they had the best people in the country to secure Polish interests in the European Union. Hence a side effect of this ad might be that the Council Presidency was organised for the purpose of promoting national interests (as opposed to being an honest broker).

The second risk related to elections concerned the marginalisation of topics related to the Presidency from the public debate in Poland. In fact, the campaign replaced the interest of the national media in the affairs of the Presidency. The focus was on the domestic political campaign and, following the elections, on the process of government formation. The news from the European Union was as often about the Polish Presidency as about new developments in the crisis, the Eurozone

Summits, or the European Council. It can justifiably be argued that the Presidency did not attract much attention either outside the country or inside Poland.

4. National public administration

Another potential risk was linked to the obvious fact that this was the first Council Presidency of Poland. There were no national experts in public administration who knew how to run it. Hence all of the 1,200 persons employed, to some extent — despite a long preparatory phase — had to learn on the job. The ability to constantly re-adjust on an on-going basis was required. On the one hand, there is an old tradition of limited consensus seeking in Polish public administration and a limited number of experienced negotiators. On the other hand, there is a strong tradition of hierarchical decision making. All of these elements could potentially have been detrimental for the Presidency: Presidency staff involved in negotiations needed to remain as flexible as possible as an honest broker, and in order for them to succeed, the level of autonomy from their supervisors also needed to be high.

Academically, there are two ways of managing the Presidencies: from the national capital or largely managed by the permanent representation in Brussels. Usually the higher the degree of autonomy of the permanent representation is, the higher the degree of effectiveness of the Presidency is. Yet in the past the Presidencies that were more political than administrative (i.e., those of larger member states) were usually managed with tighter control from the national capital. This limited their administrative effectiveness, but in exchange they may have compensated with greater political effectiveness. The French Presidency in 2008 ran a Presidency based in Paris, but as the French national capital is only 1 hour 22 minutes away by train from Brussels and the trains go every hour, during the French semester in 2008 Paris and Brussels (the French Permanent Representation) functionally (almost) merged. The Poles were in a different situation and the relative trust between various branches of the government (especially between the Warsaw-based ministries and the Polish Permanent Representation) was not fully tested ahead of the Presidency. The reason why the permanent representations needed more trust was linked with the fact that these people were in direct continuous contact with their partners from fellow member states, the Commission, and the Parliament. When engaging in negotiations, they usually had the best understanding of what compromises were feasible, and delayed acceptance of these agreements by supervisors in the national

capital was occasionally detrimental to the delicate process of seeking a consensus. Overall, however, in the long preparatory phase the typical shortcomings of Polish public administration were mostly overcome. Two examples were successful UN climate negotiations in Durban in December, where the Polish Presidency was part of the negotiating team with the European Commission, and the European patent negotiations, which substantially moved forward in the second half of 2011.

5. Relations with Lisbon EU actors

The three previous examples clearly indicated that there is a post-Lisbon functional model for the smooth running of the rotating Presidency: the activities of the prime minister and the foreign minister support those of Mr. Van Rompuy and Lady Ashton. The Polish Presidency was a test for both of these EU leaders because the Polish ministers, Prime Minister Tusk and Foreign Minister Sikorski chose not to lower their profile. Quite the contrary, they chose to work in tandem with their European counterparts. Their model was the following: not to challenge the EU leaders, but to strengthen and motivate them to be more ambitious about what was possible. They were moderately successful, more in the area of foreign policy than the European Council, though.

Both the prime minister and the foreign minister, who on the one hand were the two figures not chairing any of the Council formations and on the other hand were probably the most visible (alongside the finance minister, and at a lower level the Europe minister and the permanent representative) as faces of the Presidency. In the pre-Treaty of Lisbon situation, Prime Minister Tusk would have chaired the European Council and Foreign Minister Sikorski the foreign affairs body. Since they chose not to withdraw completely and give space to the EU leaders, the pending question ahead of the Presidency was how to organise their role in the Presidency. Clearly they preferred to have a visible role, which was important at least because of the national elections. Their relationship with the formal leaders of both Councils (European and Foreign Affairs) became central. The relations between Prime Minister Tusk and President Van Rompuy were mostly smooth. The two leaders were known to be conciliators and to accommodate others' perspectives. Hence, there was no real competition between the two; Herman Van Rompuy's main task was the situation in the Eurozone, while Prime Minister Tusk focused on all other elements. One situation, however, was important, and without a clear solution by the end of the Presidency. Following the Dutch and Finnish veto over Schengen

enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria at the September 2011 JHA Council, Prime Minister Tusk aimed at having the issue addressed at the European Council. Since the agenda of the European Council is set by its president, the two leaders met. The Poles tried to upload the issue of their concern to the European Council. The outcome was only partially successful. The issue was addressed during the November European Council meeting, but there was no agreement.

The relationship between Minister Sikorski and Lady Ashton remained more challenging. The high representative did not enjoy good press as a foreign policy chief of the European Union. Her position was weakened politically by member states and their foreign ministers, her agenda was driven by external events, and her public administration (the European External Action Service) was still under construction. In that specific situation, Minister Sikorski came into the Presidency as one of the longest-serving ministers of foreign affairs in the EU, as one of the most vocal ministers, and as someone who does not hesitate to take the initiative. In the absence of effective European foreign policy led by Brussels, there was a risk that he might take the lead on some issues. Ahead of the Presidency, there was a pending question whether Minister Sikorski would or would not challenge the leadership of High Representative Ashton. And if not, what sort of relationship would the two enjoy? The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Janos Martonyi replaced the high representative on 14 different occasions at international meetings when she was not able to participate. Would the Pole follow the model of his Hungarian and Belgian predecessors?

In reality, ahead of the Presidency, Radosław Sikorski publicly pledged loyalty to Catherine Ashton and did not undermine her position. They agreed that he would represent the Union not only at official meetings, but also on official trips. Minister Sikorski was on a policy trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan in that capacity and on another occasion also in Libya. On the ground, he was accompanied by EU diplomats. The activities related to the establishment of the European Endowment for Democracy were not challenging, but nevertheless policy defining. For that purpose both leaders, Ashton and Sikorski, wrote a letter in November to their partners asking for support. The Polish minister also represented the high representative in the European Parliament. In short, the Ashton-Sikorski cooperation was in fact more fruitful than expected.

During the Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw in September, the Poles had clearly defined objectives, even if they were not the representatives of the Union, but hosts. They were seeking tangible results from the summit especially in relation to the association agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Ukraine. The Poles were very

active in preparing for the summit. For months they were promoting the idea of opening up the European Union to Eastern Europe, pushing all actors to achieve more tangible results. However the general impression of the summit results were, at best, mixed. The DCFTA was finally negotiated, and the promise of opening DCFTA talks with Georgia and Moldova was adopted, too (they were opened later in December). At the same time, however, the summit's public image was largely hijacked by the political situation in Belarus, which boycotted the meeting (and fellow EaP nations rejected the idea of condemning Lukashenka's totalitarian regime). The main reason for mixed opinions, however, was the political situation in Ukraine after the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Polish and European diplomacy did a lot to secure positive outcomes, but the results were largely disappointing due to the situation in the partner countries in Eastern Europe.

Before and after the Eastern Partnership Summit, the Poles seemed to face a hardening wall in Eastern Europe. The political situation was in most places deteriorating, not improving, and the Poles failed to change the trend. Polish President Bronisław Komorowski's engagement with Ukrainian might have been noble, but was fruitless. The foreign minister focused extensively on Belarus, but also with few successes. Among the most important tangible results in Eastern Europe during the Presidency was, however, the agreement to include the Kaliningrad Oblast (Russian enclave surrounded by Lithuania and Poland) in the visa-free movement regime.

In its discourse on the south Mediterranean's Arab spring, Polish leaders usually underlined Poland's own experience with transition to democracy. Most visible was the Polish engagement in Tunisia, with a number of new contacts made (visits of Poles in Tunisia sharing experience of transformation, training of Tunisian civil society activists, exchanges of study trips, etc.). Foreign Minister Sikorski was also among the first Western leaders to visit Libya after the domestic conflict has ceased. This diplomatic engagement in Libya came after the Polish refusal to contribute to the NATO military intervention in the country six months earlier. The European Endowment for Democracy promoted by Poland is also supposed to be active in the southern Mediterranean region.

Last on this list, but the first during the Presidency, was the issue of European defence. This was also under the authority of the high representative, but a topic that was dear to the rotating Polish Presidency. In July, the British vetoed the creation of operational European military headquarters. What first looked like a setback for the Presidency resurfaced in early September. The Polish, French, German, Italian and Spanish foreign ministers sent a letter to Lady Ashton arguing

for establishing operational headquarters and bypassing the British veto by using the Lisbon Treaty provision on structured cooperation in the area of defence. More detrimental, however, were the internal EU divisions over the intervention in Libya. Most of the European nations, including Poland and Germany, did not engage militarily. These divisions were difficult to overcome in order to move European defence cooperation a step closer, as was the initial Polish priority.