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Pole Position: The Polish Presidency of the EU Council

The Polish Presidency of the EU Council started with high expectations on the part of other Member States and EU officials. At the outset of its Presidency, Poland enjoyed a good reputation because of its economic performance during the crisis (in 2009 Poland was the only country in the EU to achieve economic growth) and also because of its very pro-European society (over 80% of the Poles support their country's membership in the EU and two thirds believe that this membership is something good). The government in Warsaw was perceived as well prepared for the task of pushing the EU agenda forward.

As a relatively big country, with a government efficiently operating on the European scene, Poland was also expected to go beyond the day-to-day administration of the Union and become a model of the division of competences between the rotating presidency and the new post Lisbon institutions of President of the European Council and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy as well as the European External Action Service reporting to her.

At the same time, all actions of the Polish Presidency were very closely watched in other EU capitals as it was the first Presidency held by Warsaw. Even more so, as the previous Presidencies held by Member States that had joined the EU after 2004, had not been considered as terribly successful. Both the Czech Republic, because of the collapse of the government, and Hungary, because of the adoption of the controversial act on the media, were remembered as weak presidencies whose achievements had been overshadowed by negative internal developments. The Poles were aware of the fact that the standards were set high and of the challenges they would have to face. They also knew that even well prepared Presidencies were often hampered by unexpected turns of events.

In fact, this is what happened during Poland's turn. The debt crisis pushed other priorities of the Polish Presidency into the background. The upsurge of the crisis required immediate, concrete and bold action. Poland, not being a member of the Eurozone, had, however, little room for manoeuvre. The decisions were made elsewhere and the Polish Minister of Finance, even as the Chair of ECOFIN, could not participate in the meetings of the Eurogroup.

Another challenge for Poland's priorities was a very unstable situation in the European Union neighbourhood countries – both in the east and in the south. The developments of the so-called the Arab Spring attracted a lot of attention to North Africa and away from the east. In Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko increased repression against democratic activists and in Ukraine, the opposition leader Julia Timoshenko was charged by the authorities and convicted for a number of alleged crimes. All that made it much more difficult to achieve substantive progress in the area of Eastern Partnership, which had been one of Polish priorities.

Last but not least, the parliamentary elections in Poland, scheduled just in the middle of Polish Presidency, could also have affected its proper course. On the one hand, there was the risk that ministers would be more involved in the election campaign than in managing the Presidency work. On the other hand, however, there had also

been the hope that the need to achieve some tangible success to show to the voters would stimulate politicians to work even harder, also on the European scene.

Despite these serious challenges, the Polish Presidency proved to be both efficient and effective. In a number of areas it pushed forward the EU agenda. It did not introduce any revolutionary changes, but it fulfilled its duties well without any significant embarrassment that would have caused a stir in Brussels and in other capitals.

Shaping the post-Lisbon presidency system

Poland has been the first big EU Member State to hold the Presidency after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Although in 2010 Spain held the EU Presidency, this coincided with the first weeks of the Treaty being in effect, and the Spanish six months had been treated as a transition period, which did not really establish a model of the Post-Lisbon Presidency. Thus the expectations that Poland had to meet had been high.

Poland wanted to meet these high expectations not only by efficient management of the Presidency agenda but also by developing certain principles for running the EU Presidency. The crisis in Europe did not allow to carry out significant changes, but certain actions leading to establishing rules for cooperation between various institutions may be positively assessed.

Finding a role for the Prime Minister

One of the key problems of a post-Lisbon Presidency was the diminished role of the prime minister of the Member State holding the Presidency in favour of the permanent President of the European Council. In result, the heads of governments need to find their place in the new system, while remaining, most of the time in the background of the Presidency activities. It may be a problem, especially for the leaders of the bigger and more ambitious Member States, such as Poland. Donald Tusk did not move aside completely. Instead, he made suggestions to Herman Van Rompuy and tried to motivate him to act. They both remained in close contact, which resulted in the relatively smooth cooperation, without accusations that the prime minister was overstepping the bounds of his position imposed by the Lisbon Treaty.

One of the powers lost by prime ministers for the benefit of the permanent President was setting the agenda of the meetings of European Councils. Currently, in theory, the head of government has no influence over such programmes. However, the good relations between the two politicians made it possible for Warsaw to place the issue of admitting Bulgaria and Romania into the Schengen area on the agenda of the December summit.

Working with the European Parliament

The role of the European Parliament in the legislative process was significantly strengthened by the Treaty of Lisbon. As most of the EU legislation is now adopted by the Parliament and the Council within the co-decision procedure (currently the so called ordinary legislative procedure), the role of the Presidency is to achieve a compromise between the two bodies. Many months before the Presidency, Poland had undertaken to develop a good cooperation with the Parliament. Ministers visited Strasbourg early enough to establish contacts with the members of the European Parliament. During the Presidency, they attended meetings of the committees. Also, so-called Presidency breakfasts and meet-the-presidency-events were organised. The latter consisted of a series of informal meetings, organised by the Presidency in the European Parliament in Strasbourg during the plenary sessions. Their aim was to make it possible for MEPs (and others attending the plenary sessions) to address questions to the Polish Presidency ministers concerning the most current issues on the EU agenda. Each debate had a clearly defined topic. The MEPs' questions were

answered by the Presidency minister responsible for a given area or by the Minister for European Affairs.

The two addresses of Prime Minister Donald Tusk in the EP – for the launch and the conclusion of the Presidency – made a good impression. Calling for more European solidarity and for a strong position of the Parliament, the Polish prime minister drew applause even from those political groups which are in opposition to the European People's Party (of which Donald Tusk's party is a member). The positive response to those addresses was particularly important as those were some of the few moments when the prime minister of the Presidency state has a role to play.

Foreign policy – fine-tuning the cooperation

After the reform of the Lisbon Treaty, foreign policy had been removed from the Presidency dossier to fall within the remit of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Yet, the rules of cooperation with the rotating presidency in a number of areas where their competencies overlapped still had to be established. The Polish Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski, well before the Presidency, stressed that he would respect Lady Ashton's priorities and at the same time came to an agreement with her on the areas where he would stand in for the High Representative during meetings, trips or before the European Parliament. Those areas included the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Poland was the first Presidency to have agreed those principles in advance. As a result, the cooperation between the Presidency and the High Representative was smooth. Regular contacts between the Representative and the Polish Foreign Minister enabled efficient coordination at the highest level. Radosław Sikorski and his deputies represented Baroness Ashton during some foreign visits (Afghanistan, Burma) or when hosting meetings with third countries (e.g. EU-Azerbaijan Council), thus developing the framework for cooperation between the EEAS and the Presidency. However, the full potential of the good relations at the highest level and quick decision-making could not be used in full because of the problems in the functioning of the EEAS, which is still in its process formation. The necessity of close cooperation when organising the Eastern Partnership summit in September or the conference devoted to the southern dimension of the neighbourhood policy in December, revealed some communication difficulties between the two bodies. The decisions in Brussels were taken too late, which made it difficult for the Poles to implement them. Yet, sometimes the weakness of the EEAS proved beneficial for Poland as it gave the Polish side more possibilities for activity.

The principles of cooperation between the EU delegations and the embassies of the Presidency state in third countries still seem to require some work. Too often, these contacts depend on the people heading the posts and not, as they should, on agreed principles. For instance, in consular matters, where the competencies lie with the Presidency state, if the EU delegation nonetheless wants to undertake action, it can justify its intervention by quoting an important political aspect of the given issue. The letter of the foreign ministers of twelve EU Member States, including Poland, of December 2011, addressed to the High Representative, indicating the areas in the activities of the EEAS where efficiency needs to be improved, shows that there is still a lot to be done.

Polish conduct in the field of European foreign policy, aiming at improving its efficiency, could be a model for further relations between the subsequent rotating presidencies and the High Representative. However, it depends on the subsequent presidencies whether the rules set in place by the Poles remain in use. Time will show if that happens.

In the shadow of the crisis

The on-going economic crisis pushed the economy to the top of the EU agenda in the second half of 2011. New initiatives were required aiming to save the eurozone. However, as a country outside the eurozone, Poland had no influence over a number of the decisions taken in the light of the crisis. The Polish minister of finance could not participate in the meetings of the Eurogroup, even as Chair of ECOFIN. And although it is clear that countries outside the eurozone traditionally do not attend these meetings, Poland, as the country presiding over the Council work, wanted, for obvious reasons, to be present at those meetings in order to ensure more efficient chairing of the Council meetings. Eventually, Jacek Rostowski had been invited to participate in the meetings of the Eurogroup, but he declined the invitation when faced with French reluctance.

At the same time, not only as the Presidency, but as a Member State to which in future, after adopting the common currency, the new rules established for the eurozone would apply, Poland tried to ensure that the countries remaining outside the eurozone could participate in the talks on the future of the EU. The decisions adopted during the summit of 8-9 December 2011 endorse such an opportunity. However, whether the countries outside the eurozone will actually be allowed to sit at the table, will become evident when, at the beginning of 2012, the intergovernmental agreement is negotiated.

Deepening the common market

The economic crisis stressed the importance of continuing economic reforms, including the completion of the reform processes already underway. Thus the list of Polish priorities included the strengthening of the common market and for stimulating growth. In this area a lot has been achieved.

The greatest success has been the adoption of the package of six legislative acts, known as the 'six-pack', aiming to strengthen the economic governance in the European Union and to protect the Union from subsequent crises. An agreement was also reached on the so called correlation tables, that is, special documents describing the process of implementation of EU law in the Member States as well as in short-term transactions.

During the six months of the Polish Presidency progress was made towards a final agreement on the single European patent, which would reduce the costs related to registering inventions by European entrepreneurs at once within the whole EU. What remains to be clarified here is the issue of dispute resolution and the seat of the court solving these disputes.

The report "Towards a European consensus on growth" pointed out the areas where, according to the Presidency, there was development potential that should be tapped in the coming years. However, the report is not a breakthrough in the on-going debate, but is based on generally available data; it does not offer a new approach to the most important issues – how to return to the path of growth. But nobody else has presented such an innovative approach, either. The significance of the report is political rather than analytical. Its aim is to persuade politicians to think more in long-term categories, which is not an easy task in the midst of the fight against the crisis. In addition, it is expected to provide the EU institutions with further arguments to push forward with the changes in the existing law that would make the European economy more flexible.

An important event organised for the first time during the Polish Presidency was the Single Market Forum – SIMFO in Kraków. The Forum provided the opportunity for discussion between various actors involved in the internal market.

Negotiating the EU budget

With the crisis in the background, Poland also had to finalise the negotiations on the EU budget for 2012. The experience of the last year's Belgian Presidency indicated that it could be a very difficult task. However, this year the whole process went smoothly, which could have also been a result of the fact that the work depended on the good cooperation of three Poles: the President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek, the Chair of ECOFIN Jacek Rostowski and the Commissioner for Financial Programming and Budget Janusz Lewandowski.

Simultaneously, the Polish Presidency launched consultations on the future multiannual financial framework. Their purpose, however, was not to carry out negotiations but to gather opinions of the Member States, EU institutions and national parliaments. That was the aim of the first ever budget conference. At the end of the year, Poland presented a review of all the opinions to be used by the next, the Danish Presidency for launching the budget negotiations. The Danes have already announced that they will follow the Polish idea of holding a review conference.

Opening Europe

As in the area of EU economy, in another priority area, an open Europe, Poland also encountered serious challenges. The unfolding events of the Arab Spring in the south and the deepening backlash against democracy in the east made it difficult to undertake any initiatives. In addition, the concern about a new wave of immigration and the deepening economic crisis made some Member States even more hostile towards idea of enlarging the EU or even the Schengen area.

Reinventing Neighbourhood Policy

Poland, as a traditional advocate of the countries to the east of the European Union, had played a crucial role in the development of the Eastern Partnership initiative and consequently put EaP high on the Presidency agenda. On the one hand, this heightened the expectations towards Warsaw, whose presidency was seen as the last chance for revitalising the Partnership programme. On the other hand, it could have discouraged some countries, which believed that Poland always focused too much on promoting the interests of the Eastern neighbours. Moreover, the events of the so-called Arab Spring in the southern neighbourhood of the EU diverted the Union's attention from the east, so that a threat arose for the EaP to be side-lined in the ENP agenda.

Therefore, the Polish government responded to this challenge to its priorities by placing both the southern and the eastern neighbourhoods on the agenda. In the southern neighbourhood countries, Poland focused on supporting democratisation, economic transformation and civil society development. Although lacking the political experience in the south, Poland wanted to share its know-how in building democratic institutions, introducing the rule of law and implementing difficult economic reforms with the countries of North Africa entering the path of democratisation. Study visits of democracy activists to Poland were organised and missions of nurses, doctors and experts were sent to those countries. Poland was also one of the first EU Member States to recognise the National Transitional Council of Libya by opening a diplomatic post in Benghazi. Polish minister, Radosław Sikorski, was also the first foreign minister from the EU countries to visit this city in May. Taking action in that area on behalf of the European Union, Warsaw was, all the time, in close contact with the High Representative.

The diversion of the attention from east to the south was not the only challenge that had to be faced by the Polish Presidency. Poland wanted to push forward concrete steps that would bring the six Partnership countries closer to the EU. However, the lack of democratic progress on their part did not encourage the EU to intensify its efforts. Just the opposite, a number of Member States were discouraged and disappointed with the attitude of the governments of Partnership countries, which made it difficult for Poland to convince EU partners to greater involvement in the integration of the EaP countries with the European Union.

In particular, the situation in Ukraine, in view of the arrest of Julia Timoshenko, prevented making any bold political decisions. Nevertheless, it was possible to complete the negotiations of the Association Agreement, including the provisions concerning establishing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). Because of the lack of a clear will on the part of Ukraine to re-enter the path of democratisation, the EU side decided to lower the rank of the EU-Ukraine summit in December in Kiev. The Agreement was not initialled during the summit. This is likely to happen during a meeting at the lowest possible level in January. However, in the current situation, there does not seem to be a chance of the agreement being ratified by all 27 EU Member States.

Similarly, the continuing prosecution of the democratic opposition in Belarus showed that the hopes for the positive effects of the EU neighbourhood policy towards this country had been unfounded and, as a result, the EU policy towards this country has reached a stalemate.

The difficult political situation in the partner countries cast a shadow over the Eastern Partnership summit, which took place in Warsaw in September and which had been anticipated as the main event of the Polish Presidency. The Poles had taken over its organisation from the Hungarians, who called it off in May, officially because of the overlapping of other events of similar importance. In reality, at that time no one had an idea what could be expected from the summit. A few months later, the situation was no better. Intensive activity of Polish diplomats (in Brussels and during visits in European and eastern capitals) at least resulted in the fact that the participants of the summit did not leave empty-handed.

The absence of the Belorussian delegation was a certain dissonance during the summit. President Lukashenko, who is one of the people whom the EU does not grant a visa, had not been invited to the meeting. Minsk, feeling offended, decided to not send a delegation at all and announced that it would not recognise the results of the summit. Whereas the European leaders of the EU institutions, Angela Merkel and Donald Tusk met with representatives of the Belorussian opposition.

A joint declaration of the EU and the EaP condemning the actions of the Belorussian regime was to be signed during the summit. Eventually, only the EU Member States signed the declaration, the Partnership countries refused to accept the text that strongly criticised Belarus. This lack of consensus was by some perceived as a failure of the summit, which is a disputable assessment. The consent of the whole EU to a clear, strong declaration is a positive sign. Softening the position towards the regime in order to satisfy the authorities of the countries, which are not fully democratic either, would not have been an appropriate solution.

The summit was remarkable for a strong representation of heads of states and heads of governments from the EU. Practically all the leaders were present. The only one missing was the UK prime minister (Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister attended) and the president of France (the prime minister attended). Thus even though the

representation was perhaps not one hundred per cent, it was still impressive, especially as compared to the attendance at the previous EaP summit in Prague in 2009. Securing the presence of such a group was a great success of the Poles who had made a lot of effort to make sure that the leaders came to Warsaw.

The final declaration of the summit included a statement that it was the aim of the EU and the Partnership states to have the visa obligation waived. Thanks to Polish efforts, it was possible to avoid the use of the phrase "in the long term". Emphasis was placed on applying the principle "more for more". On the other hand, the document did not contain the phrase, proposed by the Poles, about the European prospects of the six Partnership countries. In the prevailing negative atmosphere towards those countries it was not reasonable to expect that the EU Member States averse to such reference would agree to put it in the declaration. The tangible results included expansion of youth exchange and establishing the Eastern Partnership Public Administration Academy in Warsaw.

The tangible achievements related to the Eastern Partnership include also the adoption by the EU Council of the negotiations mandates for visa-facilitation and re-admission agreements with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Negotiations also started on DCFTA with Moldova and Georgia. In both cases it meant fulfilling the commitment made during the summit.

In spite of the adverse circumstances, Poland managed to achieve quite a lot in the area of Eastern Partnership. A number of these results could be reached only because it was Warsaw that held the Presidency. It was thanks to the Polish efforts, commitment of the officials and the strong position of Poland in the EU that some EU Member States did not block the progress of the eastern policy work. It remains a challenge for the coming months to make sure that the initiative does not disappear from the EU agenda, when countries less interested in it will hold the Presidency of the EU Council.

Putting democracy on EU the foreign policy agenda

The Polish response to the weakness of the democratic forces in the eastern and southern neighbourhood was the idea of establishing the European Endowment for Democracy, a new instrument expected to support transformation processes faster and more effectively than the existing ones. Poles managed to include the initiative in the EU documents relatively fast, as for EU standards. Minister Sikorski announced the initiative in February 2011 and in May it was already mentioned in the joint EC and EEAS communication on neighbourhood policy. In September the willingness to establish the fund was confirmed by EU foreign ministers during an informal meeting in Poland. The work on the establishment of the Endowment was taken over by the EEAS, but it was the Poles who did the lobbying. The final decision establishing the EED was taken by way of a declaration adopted in December during the COREPER meeting, a declaration that was not opposed by any Member State. It was a great success for Poland as immediately after the idea had appeared, the sentiments towards it in Brussels and in some European capitals had not been friendly. The officials of the Commission feared that the instruments they managed would lose importance and German political foundations saw the Endowment as competition. Eventually, however, nobody opposed the idea of creating the fund, what remains to be clarified are the way of its financing and its mode of operation.

The activity aiming at establishing the EED was not the only Polish activity to increase the importance of the support for democracy in the EU arena. The frequent reference to this issue has resulted in a tendency within the EU to move away from treating development assistance only in terms of technical assistance. Nowadays,

more and more often, plans are made to fund activities supporting transformation and the civil society and to make subsidies granted to governments dependent on the level of democracy development in a given country. Poland has chosen the right moment when, as a result of the events in the southern and eastern neighbourhood, the EU saw the importance of those issues and was ready to open itself to the proposals made, among other, by the Polish Presidency.

Thwarted ambitions: enhancing EU security cooperation

The greater involvement of Poland in issues of support for democracy in the southern neighbourhood was to some extent an attempt to “compensate” for Poland’s refusal to take part in the military operation in Libya. By sending democracy activists and experts on transformation as well as medical personnel, Warsaw wanted to become part of the European activity in this country. In spite of that, an opportunity to be a party to consultations on military matters had been lost, which had a negative effect on the Polish activity aiming to develop the concept for strengthening the common EU security policy. The plans in this field were at the beginning quite ambitious.

The initiative to establish a common permanent command for planning of military and civilian EU actions, proposed by Poland, was supported by all EU Member States except the UK, which made it impossible to reach agreement in July. However, the fact that Spain and Italy later decided to join the initiative of the Weimar Triangle (Germany, France, Poland), meant that the idea had not been totally abandoned. No breakthrough was achieved in the debate on EU Battlegroups.

The “newcomers” open the door to “newcomers”

A symbolic moment of the Polish Presidency was the signing of the Accession Treaty with Croatia. A country that has itself only recently joined the EU, formally opened the door to another EU member. Yet, the political consent to accepting Croatia had already been achieved during the Hungarian Presidency, it cannot, therefore, be treated as a success for Warsaw. It was, however, the role of the Polish officials to put the finishing touches to the accession agreement and give it the final shape during the Polish six months.

The work on taking forward the negotiations with other countries in line for EU membership was pushed to the background, mainly because of the generally unfavourable atmosphere in the EU Member States. No new chapters in the negotiations with Turkey were opened. During the December summit, Montenegro obtained a declaration that the negotiations would start in 2012, whereas the decision on opening the negotiations with Serbia is to be taken during the meeting of the European Council in March 2012.

The biggest disappointment

The reluctance to admit new members to the EU was not the only obstacle that Poland had to overcome. There was also lack of enthusiasm towards opening the Schengen Area to Romania and Bulgaria. In spite of the efforts of Polish officials and the completion of the technical preparations, the political will was not there. Even when, as a result of Polish pressure, the issue was placed on the agenda of the December summit, the Netherlands remained adamant and refused to agree. The Polish side described it as “the biggest disappointment of the Presidency”. At the same time, it showed that even the most efficient work done by the Member State presiding over the work of the Council may not be sufficient to succeed if even one state lacks the political will.

National Elections: voters choose stability and Europe

Contrary to many concerns, the Presidency did not suffer because of the parliamentary elections that took place in the middle of its course. European issues

did not become the subject of dispute during the election campaign, which focused mainly on internal matters. Ministers did not neglect their duties as chairs of Council meetings. The government did try to take advantage of the time of the Presidency to promote its significance more strongly, but that did not dominate over the Presidency work or the elections.

The only event that caused a stir in Brussels, in a negative sense, was the appearance of Commissioner Janusz Lewandowski in a Civic Platform election commercial. In the commercial, he argued, together with Prime Minister Donald Tusk and EP President Jerzy Buzek, that it was their team that was the best in promoting Polish interests in the EU. Such statements were in contradiction with the impartiality that should characterise EU Commissioners.

The outcome of the election, in which for the first time since the democratic transition of 1989 Poles re-elected the incumbent government, demonstrated that the voters want stability in the midst of the global crisis, but also an indication of a strong support for the pro-EU policies of Tusk's government.

What next for Poland in the EU?

Six months of the Polish Presidency in the EU Council allowed Poland to graduate from a new Member State category to a fully-fledged actor on the European scene. A successful conduct of the Presidency, combined with political stability and strong economic performance during the crisis, as well as unceasing zeal for deeper EU integration, has given Poland a front-row position in EU policy debates. For once, Poland is seen in Europe as part of the solution rather than a part of the problem.

This is not to say that Polish decision and opinion-makers can look at Poland's future within the EU with complacency. The debt crisis continues to pose a danger of the unravelling of the common currency and the likely consequences of such a development for the Polish economy and political stability would be disastrous. At the same time the only way out of the debt crisis is further fiscal – and political – integration, first of all among the members of the eurozone. This in turn, threatens to leave Poland outside of the EU hard-core, with what some analysts describe as a 'second-class' membership. Poland fought, with some success, against such a scenario during the December summit, nevertheless its position is still precarious. Remaining outside the eurozone, Poland has limited possibilities to exert political influence regarding the fiscal Union. Therefore it would be advisable to adopt the common currency as soon as possible, and for now – to declare a specific date of entering the eurozone. On the other hand, at the time when it is not clear what the eurozone is going to look like in the future and what joining it would practically mean for the Polish economy, haste is not recommended. Financial markets are sending signals that they will be more interested in investing in the Polish economy if it does not use the common European currency, which is now in such dire straits.

The position of the Polish government is therefore rather cautious, namely that adopting the Euro remains an objective of Poland, but no official date for the joining the eurozone is set. Instead, the Polish government has expressed the commitment to implement the necessary reforms that would make it possible to adopt the euro when the eurozone steers out of trouble. Prime Minister Tusk also stated that Poland would meet the eurozone membership criteria by the end of term of office of the current parliament (2015).

Trouble is also brewing in another policy area which is of crucial interest for Poland, the Eastern Partnership. Thanks to concerted efforts of the Polish Presidency, EaP has remained high on the agenda of EU external relations and neighbourhood policy, in spite of the debt crisis and the Arab Spring, on which much of attention had been

focused last year. Poland now needs to ensure that the balance between the eastern and the southern parts of EU neighbourhood is maintained in the future financial perspective and that the EU remains pro-active in countering anti-democracy backlash in some EaP countries. Last but not least, Poland should continue to press for steady progress in the visa liberalisation process, which has the potential to be a most powerful tool to bring the societies of EaP countries closer to the EU.

Next year's parliamentary elections in Ukraine will test the strength of democracy in the largest and most important EaP country. Poland should urge other EU partners to continue to put pressure on the Ukrainian government to abide by democratic standards. At the same time EU should use all the tools at its disposal (such as European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights or newly established Civil Society Facility) to assist democracy activists – watchdogs, think tanks and other civil society organisations. The EaP Civil Society Forum, which has already become the most important venue for networking and debates of civil society and democracy activists from EaP and EU countries, requires further support and a degree of institutionalisation in order to conduct effective advocacy vis-à-vis both EaP governments and EU institutions towards greater democratisation and integration for the region with the EU. Poland should continue to be both the advocate for Eastern Partnership as well as a champion of democracy support in the EU neighbourhood and beyond. It should be actively involved in the process of the establishment of the European Endowment for Democracy. Even though the EEAS is currently responsible for the implementation of the decision to create the EED, Poland should not only monitor the process but provide responsible officials with both conceptual and political support. Finally, in order to maintain its position of the champion of European integration, Poland should continue to act in the community spirit, fighting the temptation to play the game of blaming Brussels and to succumb to the rhetoric of 'defending national interests', which has become so common in the EU since the outbreak of the crisis.

The Polish Presidency will not go down in history as a game changer, but in the post-Lisbon European architecture, this is not the role it was expected to play. Being an honest broker, finalising several important negotiations, efficient implementation of the agenda and active engagement in the debates on the future of the EU and the European values, allows us to positively assess its outcomes and to include it among the successful presidencies. Let us only hope that Poland will continue to play such a constructive role and to contribute to overcoming Europe's crisis and giving the idea of European integration a new lease of life for the 21st Century.

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Europe for Citizens
Programme



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
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