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GERMAN PRESS COMMENTARIES ON POLAND'S PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

From July to December 2011, Poland for the first time assumed leadership of the Council of the European Union. This was a serious challenge for both Polish politicians and public administration, local governments and non-governmental organisations. It was difficult due to the lack of experience. It was rightly assumed that organisational solution and conduct standards would be developed in the course of the six-month Presidency. The task of Poland, and all Member States that hold the Presidency, was, *inter alia*, to organise numerous meetings in accordance with detailed EU procedures. In order to meet the requirements of the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in 2009, Poland (together with the other states of the Presidency Trio, i.e. Denmark and Cyprus) launched the work on the decision-making on the 2014-2020 EU budget, shaping the Cohesion Policy, the functioning of the Economic and Monetary Union and expanding the integration process.[1]

In Germany, the view that the rank of the Presidency of the EU Council is falling is currently dominant. Germans themselves made this happen, as they voted in favour of introducing new solutions to the functioning of the European Union. Apart from the mentioned lack of experience in exercising the Presidency by the trio, the establishment of the office of the Permanent President of the European Council and widened competences of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy additionally lessened the role of the Member State Presidency.

The priorities of the Polish Presidency (European integration as a source of growth, Secure Europe – food, energy, defence, Europe benefiting from openness) were formulated after thorough analyses of various factors. The criteria that needed to be considered while selecting the priorities followed from, *inter alia*, the evaluation of the progress in EU work in particular fields and the resulting prospects for the period of the Presidency (e.g. planned reforms and reviews of particular policies, long-term legislative and non-legislative EU initiatives). The selection of priorities also required to take into consideration the challenges and needs that were facing the EU in the internal and external dimensions (e.g. structuring the common energy

[1] J. Węc, *Nowe zasady sprawowania prezydencji w Radzie Unii Europejskiej. Bilans prezydencji belgijskiej*, "Przegląd Zachodni" no. 3, 2011, pp. 3-20.

policy, the future of EU relations with third countries and international organisations, enlargement policy), and the evaluation of the current situation on the EU international and internal political arena (events in North Africa and their impact on the Presidency, the Eurozone crisis, common interests and goals of the Presidency Trio, and the parliamentary election campaign in Poland).[2]

The Federal Republic of Germany, experienced in exercising the Presidency, pre-occupied with saving indebted Greece and developing appropriate mechanisms of financial control for Member States troubled by budget deficits, adopted an ambivalent approach to Poland's dealings. The election campaign and the victory of the Civic Platform's and the Polish People's Party's coalition in the parliamentary elections re-assured the German public that Poland would continue to act in the interest of the entire Union.

The Polish Presidency did not attract much attention of the German press as reflected in a very low number of articles on this topic. This had its advantages and disadvantages. The preceding Presidencies of new EU Member States: Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary were accompanied by scandals and disputes.[3] The German press was full of negative comments. The well-prepared and quite efficiently managed Polish Presidency was not attractive to the press and, consequently, it kept vanishing from journalists' "sight".

This paper is a chronological review of German nation-wide dailies and weeklies, including the business newspaper "Handelsblatt", which owing to its profile could theoretically be an interesting source of commentaries, though also in this case the search was not very successful. All articles were written by one group of commentators which is indicative of the fact that few German journalists are well-versed in Polish affairs.

MOST IMPORTANT TASKS OF THE POLISH PRESIDENCY

The Polish Presidency was not perceived by German commentators solely as a series of successes, speeches and celebrations of various occasions. For the Polish government, this was a period of arduous work and efforts undertaken to convince European leaders to adopt Poland's vision of EU policies. One of the priorities of the Polish Presidency that attracted the attention of German journalists was the EU policy towards the Former Soviet Republics bordering on the EU, the Eastern Partnership and the drive to limit Russia's neo-imperial policies. The latter was agreed on by all Polish political parties.

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[2] Z. Czachór, *Prezydencja w Unii Europejskiej i jej priorytety. Analiza politologiczna*, in: Z. Czachór, T. Szymczyński (ed.) (2011), *Priorytety prezydencji Polski w Radzie Unii Europejskiej*, Warsaw, pp. 19-46; A. Jaskulski, *Formułowanie i realizacja priorytetów prezydencji. Mechanizmy, instrumenty, aktorzy*, *ibid.*, pp. 83-108.

[3] See: S. Bolzen, *Ungarn hat Europa getriezt – Jetzt ist Polen dran*, "Die Welt" 30.06.2011.

"Although Tusk and Sikorski make friendly gestures toward Moscow, Frank-Walter Steinmeier's rapprochement through interdependence (*Annäherung durch Verflechtung*) policy towards Russia is considered by Poles to be naive" – wrote Thomas Urban, and continued to say: "In the Polish view, the conviction which prevails is that it is necessary to create an alternative channel of energy supply that would bypass Russia. Lack of understanding of the above by European governments causes frustration".[4]

The pro-European policy of Donald Tusk was pragmatically evaluated from the perspective of the benefits it reaped for Poland. Thanks to EU funds, neglected regions have been modernised, and both the society and national patriotic politicians have seemed to appreciate those changes. Tusk was assessed through his long and good relation with Chancellor Angela Merkel, which was considered to constitute a value added to Polish-German relations. Supporting Germany's position on the adoption of tough cost cutting programmes was not in line with the efforts of the Polish Prime Minister to build a front of net beneficiaries against net contributors (Warsaw Conference of Secretaries of State), which irritated Berlin and Paris. It was generally believed that this resulted from the need to rescue the Polish national budget with EU funds. As Thomas Urban ironically stated: "This makes Tusk a European from his personal belief and due to financial shortages".[5]

Poland, upon assuming the Presidency, had to face the crisis that affected many walks of social and political life. The financial crisis that enveloped the entire Union was most palpable. The crisis in trust among Member States, toward EU institutions, the crisis in the Schengen zone, and finally the crisis of trust toward the states applying for EU membership overlapped with the financial crisis.

Most German commentators were interested in how Poland would cope with the proposals of the European Commission concerning the 2014-2020 EU budget. In the opinion of a researcher from the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels, this was to be "the first important confessional".[6] The presiding state holds talks and listens to arguments of other countries to work out an appropriate solution and meet expectations of the whole EU27. This time it was Poland that had to "hear out the confession" of others for the first time and thus its role was reversed.

On the first day of the Polish Presidency, the journal "Die Welt" published a five-column article by Gerhard Gnauck, where he outlined the condition of the EU Eastern Policy, the favourite project – as he put it – of many Polish politicians. Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski, while interviewed, expressed readiness to assist and cooperate with Catherine Ashton in the area of EU foreign policy and support to Arab countries on their path to democracy. That was to last much

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[4] Th. Urban, *Der Warschauer Freund*, "Süddeutsche Zeitung" (hereinafter SZ) 01.07.2011, p. 3.

[5] Th. Urban, *Mocny człowiek nad Wisłą*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" (hereinafter GW) 28-29.01.2012, p. 34.

[6] *Jak rządzić tą Unią*, GW 01.07.2011, p. 4.

longer than Poland's transformation to a democratic state but the steps taken by the EU and the *European Endowment for Democracy* foundation were to support those efforts.[7]

It was underlined that the successful 2004 EU enlargement was the outcome of long-term support provided by "old" EU Member States in the form of exchange programmes for administration officers, training and consultancy, not the mention the issue of border protection. Warsaw would like to replicate this model in the case of its eastern neighbours, but – as Gerhard Gnauck rightly observed– this would not be an easy task since divisions among the ten "youngest" Member States already surfaced. Poland was to carter – in his opinion – for effective cooperation with Ukraine, Estonia was to overlook economic reforms in Georgia, and Lithuania was to cater for good neighbourhood relations with Belarus. To this end, the parliament in Vilnius initialled the agreement on cross-border traffic with Belarus, which will enable visa-free crossing of the border for 1.4 million citizens living on both sides of the border. All initiatives of CEE countries deserved attention, as – in Gnauck's assessment – although "they don't have any money, they have a lot of good will".[8]

Among achievements of EU Eastern Policy, Gnauck listed the opening of the House of United Belarus in Vilnius by Lithuanian Foreign Affairs Minister Andronius Azubalis, the European Humanities University headquartered in Vilnus since 2004 when Belarusian authorities expelled it from Belarus, and the *Belsat* TV channel financed by Poland. Gnauck also noted that Polish economist and former mayor of Warsaw Marcin Święcicki was an economic policy advisor in Ukraine.[9] This project, financed by the EU and the United Nations Development Programme, made it possible for Ukraine to join the WTO and revise more than 55 Ukrainian acts of law.[10]

Gnauck quoted the opinion of a journalist from Wrocław, who claimed that the events in North Africa and the Middle East pushed Eastern Europe aside. Gnauck seemed to doubt the possibility of replicating the successful model of Polish accession and applying the same approach to other Eastern European countries. The main worries of the EU were – in Gnauck's opinion – the flood of refugees from the east and the south and secure outlet markets. He also noted the lack of involvement of the other side, as – as he ironically stated – the elite of six EU partner states intend to adopt a western lifestyle, but retain the eastern style of exercising power and pursuing business.[11]

The summit of Eastern Partnership leaders, planned for 29-30 September 2011, raised many concerns in Poland. With a revolution at the southern border of the EU, it was believed that it would be a success if all invited guests showed up at the sum-

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[7] G. Gnauck, *Kein Geld, aber viel guter Wille*, "Die Welt" 1.07.2011, p. 7.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*

mit in Warsaw.[12] French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown did not participate in the inauguration of the Partnership held in Prague in 2009. Once again Angela Merkel was the only "boss" of a large EU Member State that participated in the summit. France sent Prime Minister François Fillon, the UK sent Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, and Italy – a Secretary of State. As "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" put it: "The EU lost its hope for enhancing relations with its eastern neighbours. Belarus, at the last minute, decided to steer clear of the Warsaw summit, and President Yanukovych's proposals concerning the trail of former Prime Minister Tymoshenko only made the European guests shake their heads".[13] "Süddeutsche Zeitung", in the article under a meaningful title *Unhandy East* stated that "the summit only made it evident that there is no sound basis for closer integration. Belarus is ruled by a dictator, the Ukrainian president "excludes" the leader of the opposition – Yulia Timoshenko disrespecting the law, Armenia and Azerbaijan don not stand a chance of making it to the list of free and democratic states".[14] The author of the article suggested that the EU should not settle for a compromise for fear of these states turning to Russia. According to German commentators, that fear has been unjustified for two reasons. First, those countries dislike the prospect of Russian hegemony. Secondly, their economic future is linked to the European market. Such resoluteness may only impress other neighbours.[15]

The Eastern Partnership summit was dominated by the imprisonment of Former Prime Minister Timoshenko and the refusal of the Belarusian Foreign Minister to participate in the discussions. The EU sustained its decision to ban Lukashenko and 192 Belarusian officials from entering the European Union. In the absence of Belarusian politicians loyal to the regime, Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, and Donald Tusk, the host of the meeting, met with representatives of the Belarusian opposition. During the one-hour conversation with Chancellor Angela Merkel, the oppositionists criticised the involvement of the Deutsche Bank in Belarus and called for further sanctions to be imposed on the Belarusian regime. Merkel promised to exert influence on the Bank and, in a press statement, underlined the necessity of providing the Belarusian opposition with further support. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine[16] did not consent to strongly condemn Belarus in the joint final statement. Thus EU Member States issued their statement in which they expressed deep concern over the violation of human rights, democratic principles and rule of law in Belarus, as well as the worsening situation of opposition politicians held in detention facilities. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova awaited an explicit signal from EU Member States confirming they would be accepted to the EU

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[12] D. Pszczółkowska, *Rozkład jazdy polskiej prezydencji*, GW 01.07.2011, p. 4.

[13] *EU streitet mit der Ukraine und Weißrussland*, "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" (hereinafter FAZ),01.10.2011, p. 6.

[14] *Sperriger Osten*, SZ 01.10.2011, p. 4.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *EU streitet...*, p. 6.

group but had to make do with the enigmatic statement: "the European aspirations of some of our partners have been acknowledged".[17]

In the first month of the Polish Presidency, the Munich newspaper "Süddeutsche Zeitung" criticised Poland and the Czech Republic for using the Polish Presidency to cater for their own interests and for jointly counterbalancing Germany and Austria's criticism of nuclear power plants. The latter was declared by Czech Prime Minister Petr Nečas. Donal Tusk underlined that at the time it was impossible to concurrently eliminate coal energy and ban shale gas extraction. Eurosceptic Czech President Vaclav Klaus described Chancellor Merkel's decision as totally unreasonable and populist. These critical about Germany voices were soon joined by other members of the Visegrad Group, which despite the Fukushima tragedy, opted for further acquisition of energy resources and development of the energy sector. To the journalist's satisfaction, the Czech CEZ energy group, 50% of which is owned by the state, took Germany's position as a challenge and declared its intent to invest in renewable energy, wind energy included, also in Germany.[18]

The spreading crisis made many players on the European political arena adopt an opinion on this issue. "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" quoted Donald Tusk's words: "jokes aside now".[19] The amendments to the EU Treaty planned by France and Germany received strong support from Poland – wrote the journal, and the statement of the Polish Prime Minister that he would support all solutions strengthening European integration were underlined. Poland's expectations concerning the participation of non-Eurozone members in discussions and debates within the Eurogroup met with understanding, but it was noted that Tusk promoted strengthening of the role of the European Central Bank in lowering debt levels, contrary to the position of Angela Merkel.[20]

Poland's involvement in counteracting the crisis was also noticed by "Süddeutsche Zeitung". The news titled "Poland and Denmark help save the euro" made the front page news.[21] It was underlined that non-Eurozone members that support the Eurogroup in its struggle against the crisis undertook to transfer 6-7 billion euro to the International Monetary Fund.

LEADERS OF THE PRESIDENCY

Just like a state is perceived through its political leaders, the Presidency also has its leaders that become the face of the EU for six months. The words they say shape the language of international communication. The process of building under-

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] K. Brill, *Bündnis gegen Atomausstieg*, SZ 19.07.2011, p. 7.

[19] *Tusk: Polen wird Deutschland und Frankreich unterstützen*, FAZ,03.12.2011, p. 2.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] C. Gammelin, C. Hulverscheidt, *Polen und Dänemark helfen bei der Euro-Rettung*, SZ 20.1.2011, p. 1.

standing, without which no dialogue is possible, depends on the transparency and trustworthiness of that language. During the Polish Presidency, Prime Minister Donald Tusk bore the palm on the European political arena. He was the one who was interviewed, quoted and whose speeches were published.

Already on the eve of the Polish Presidency, "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" published an interview with Prime Minister Tusk. In that interview, the Prime Minister outlined European policy priorities that were to be implemented in the second half of 2011. The most important tasks included re-winning trust in the idea of Europe without internal borders. Tusk referred to historical values that could serve as model values for the entire world. Tusk believed that it was necessary to support the efforts of Prime Minister George Papandreou who tried saving bankrupting Greece. Referring to Polish experiences, he underlined that although Poland's situation was far worse twenty years ago, Poland never doubted that Europe would provide it with effective support. This conviction gave Poland the strength to repair its economy and reform fossilised public institutions. The third task of the Polish Presidency, in the opinion of the Prime Minister, was to support the Eastern Partnership and finalise Croatia's accession to the EU. Both EU projects, wisely managed, would contribute to advancements in Eastern Europe. Tusk illustrated the developments in Ukraine with a graph of a sine wave with its last interval increasing as Ukraine drew notably closer to European standards in the last 10 years. When discussing Belarus, Tusk adopted an outright realistic approach and, although he was aware that Lukashenko considered him to be his personal enemy, he said that one could not ignore the violation of human rights. The Prime Minister asked by a journalist about the Polish veto against reducing the transfer of assistance measures in the new budget, responded that Poland supports the EU Cohesion Policy which takes interests of the entire European community into account, not only national interests. Tusk also underlined that funds were the most important instrument supporting real integration for countries with weaker economies.[22]

On the day following Prime Minister Tusk's speech opening the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union which was given in Strasbourg, Thomas Urban – the long-time correspondent of the Munich newspaper "Süddeutsche Zeitung", titled his commentary *Friend from Warsaw*, and referred to Donald Tusk as " a European leader and thinker".[23] Although the title of the article and photo of the Polish Prime Minister with the EU flag in the background was highly optimistic, the concern about the result of the Polish parliamentary election scheduled for autumn 2011, pervaded the article. Polls indicating that the conservative and pro-European Civic Platform was ahead of the leftist and nationalist Law and Justice party (*sic!*) were no guarantee of victory. As Urban rightly noted, the previous election showed that former Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński was capable of closing that gap in

[22] K. Schuller, *Wir dürfen in der EU nicht nur an nationale Interessen denken*, FAZ 30.06.2011, p. 5.

[23] Th. Urban, *Der Warschauer Freund*, SZ 01.07.2011, p. 3.

the last phase of the campaign. Urban reminded his readers of the years 2005-2007, when Poland was perceived as a "trouble-maker" (*Störenfried*) in Brussels and other European capitals, and recalled that Tusk would probably like to forget about the Civic Platform's initiative to block EU reforms.

Urban did not forget to mention Radosław Sikorski who initially deemed the USA to be Poland's greatest ally. As the author of the commentary observed, Sikorski became a fervent advocate of European integration only after his disillusionment with neo-conservative officers in President George Bush's administration who failed to provide Poles with visa-free entry to the USA. What both Sikorski and Tusk jointly pursued – according to Urban – was the struggle for sustaining subsidies from the Cohesion Fund as the EUR 67 billion allocated to Poland for 2008-2013 made Poland their largest net recipient in the EU.[24]

German commentators underlined that Donald Tusk in his speech on the programme of the Presidency given on 6 July 2011 to the European Parliament, resolutely declared that the European integration process would be continued. The speech confirmed that the Polish Prime Minister believed that solidarity between nations is part of Europe's history and that the support provided to Greece was not an act of charity. Attention was also drawn to the warnings voiced by the Prime Minister that Europe always brought disasters onto itself by yielding to nationalism and protectionism.[25] The very tone used by the Polish Prime Minister when referring to the financial crisis was underlined.

"[…] I would like to get straight to the point by setting out what, in my opinion, are the most important areas, not only for the next six months of the Polish Presidency, but what are also permanent areas of responsibility and permanent challenges for the whole of Europe. This is the simplest of questions; there is nothing complicated about it. Is the answer to the crisis – both to the immediate one related to the financial crisis and the situation of some countries in Europe, particularly in the south of Europe, and the answer to the deeper crisis, the crisis of confidence in Europe, the global crisis – is the answer to be a departure from Europe, a reduction of what is European and held in common, or is it to be what we have proved over many years and what has worked well? Both the experience of Europe as a community, as well as the personal experience of every one of us, tell us that the best response of Europeans – the best answer Europeans have come up with – is a united Europe. There is something I would like to stress as strongly as possible […] a united Europe, its institutions, its budget and its goals are not the cause of the crisis. We know very well, after all, where the sources of the current financial crisis are, and it would be a wrong answer and the worst possible answer if we were to believe those who are saying: let us cut back on Europe and this will be our answer to the crisis".[26]

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[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Tusk: Mehr Europa, weniger Krise*, FAZ 07.07.2011, p. 4.

[26] *Text of Donald Tusk's Speech given to the European Parliament*, "Rzeczpospolita", 7.06.2011, and http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20110706+ITEM-002+DOC+XML+V0//EN

The head of the Polish government was often interviewed by German journalists. He did not avoid thorny issues and provided clear answers even to most difficult questions. Tusk took every opportunity to underline Poland's economic achievements and efforts to save the foundations of the EU. At conferences he tried to convinced his audience that it was the Polish, not the Greek, Spanish or Portuguese market that was flexible and more open to rapid changes. If quoted, his pro-European approach and the conciliatory language were approvingly commented upon in German press. From the German perspective, Tusk deserves praise for the good PR he did for Poland.

The Polish President assumed a similar tone in his speeches. Bronisław Komorowski used the opportunity provided by the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on Good Neighbourhood and Friendly Cooperation by the Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany, celebrated shortly before the Polish Presidency, to demonstrate Poland's will to continue the European unification process and underline the significance of Polish-German relations. As "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" noted, most of the President's speech was about Europe. Komorowski compared Poland's and Germany's "investment in reconciliation" which bears fruit now, with the situation in the EU. The President expressed the opinion that what Germany and Poland had succeeded in doing was also possible for the good of all of Europe.[27] "Bronek", as President Christian Wulff nicknamed the Polish President, "took personal risks and contributed to the fall of the Iron Wall and reunification of Germany, for which Germany is very grateful to Poland".[28] The Polish President reminded that Europe is not only a geographical area. Its definition is based on European identity and common cultural values, that is why he wished the Polish Presidency to strengthen European integration arm in arm with its western partner.

MINISTER RADOSŁAW SIKORSKI'S SPEECH OF 28 NOVEMBER 2011

As the German Chancellor undertook determined action and attempted to push forward her own ideas on solving the financial crisis, she had to search for external allies. Chancellor Merkel received much support from Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski. On 28 November, in his speech consulted beforehand with Germany and delivered at the quarters of the German Council of Foreign Relations (DGAP) in Berlin, Sikorski called for new European solidarity and the courage to take difficult decisions that might yield full European integration (federation). Sikorski urged Germany to help the Eurozone "survive and prosper" and do that for "the common good" as no other EU Member State was capable of doing that. When encouraging Germany to take action, the Polish Minister stated that he feared Ger-

[27] *Komorowskis Geschichte und die Zukunft*, FAZ 18.06.2011, p. 2.
[28] C. Nohn, *Glücklich in der Gemeinschaft*, FAZ 18/19/06.2011, p. 6.

man power less than he was beginning to fear German inactivity. Sikorski went on to say: "you may not fail to lead. You cannot dominate, but should lead the reforms".[29]

The support of the Polish politician, who *de facto* advocated Germany's ideas about saving the Eurozone, was badly needed by the Chancellor but had its price which Germany was ready to pay. Counter to the intentions of France to create a homogeneous Eurogroup with its own principles and rules, which would be synonymous to building a two-speed Europe, Poland was to be included in the decision-making process concerning the future of the Monetary Union and thus on European integration. In her speech of 2 December 2011 to the Bundestag, the Chancellor emphasised that the Eurozone must be open to all states that wish to cooperate with it. Merkel lauded Warsaw for its willingness to take on greater obligations and pursue the path toward the EU stability, although Poland has not adopted the euro yet.[30]

"Die Welt" daily and "Die Zeit" weekly reprinted almost the entire speech of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs. The *Welt-Gruppe*, which was a media partner of the DGAP meeting, titled its article "Germany Must Lead More Strongly"[31] and "Die Zeit" quoted the following words of the Minister: "I fear German inactivity".[32] The front page news of the day in "Die Welt" was the Law and Justice party's attack on Sikorski. Jarosław Kaczyński, the party leader, accused Sikorski of violating the Polish Constitution and announced that Sikorski would have to face the Polish Constitutional Tribunal, which seemed highly unlikely. In the editorial, it was underlined that Sikorski was very involved in EU affairs and concerned with overcoming the crisis. His personal comments on the future of the EU were presented. His speech, brimming with ironic remarks, was received as an arduous defence speech persuading EU Member States to unlimited deepening of European integration. The determination of the Minister was admired, especially when he spoke of fearing not Germany's power, but German inactivity. His courage surpassed standard levels, since – as "Die Welt" noted – he gave his speech "a stone's throw away from the Brandenburg Gate".[33]

One day later, "Die Welt" published Gerhard Gnauck's commentary. He reported that in Poland, Sikorski's words triggered a heated debate on Europe. It was Sikorski who led the debate having joined the Berlin "choir of euroenthusiasts".[34] Ideas of Kaczyński and Ziobro of Solidarna Polska (United Poland) to submit a motion of no

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[29] "Poland and the future of the European Union", Radosław Sikorski, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Berlin, 28 November 2011 r. http://www.msz.gov.pl/files/docs/-komunikaty/20111128BERLIN/ radoslaw–sikorski–polska–a–przyszlosc–ue.pdf; *Europakrise: "Ich fürchte die deutsche Untätigkeit"*, "Die Zeit" 30. 11. 2011; T. Bielecki, *Europa mówi Sikorskim*, GW of 30.11.2011; *Vorschläge des polnischen Außenministers. Merkel sieht Schwung für EU-Vertragsreform*, FAZ 29.11.2011.

[30] [bart], *Merkel mówi o przyszłości Europy i chwali Polskę*, GW 2.12.2011.

[31] *Deutschland muss stärker führen*, "Die Welt" 30.11.2011, p. 2.

[32] *Ich fürchte die deutsche Untätigkeit*, "Die Zeit" 01.12.2011, p. 15.

[33] *Mehr Europa wagen*, "Die Welt" 30.11.2011, p. 1.

[34] G. Gnauck, *Polens Opposition warnt vor 'Viertem Reich'*, "Die Welt" 01.12.2011, p. 3.

confidence against Sikorski was supported by "Rzeczpospolita" conservative daily, which criticised the "defence of the euro" claiming that it would not solve the problem but prolong the dying of the euro. Gnauck referred to commentaries published in the liberal "Gazeta Wyborcza" daily, which recalled that the French Finance Minister asked Polish Finance Minister Rostowski to leave the room when the Polish Minister demanded Poland's participation in Eurogroup debates. "Gazeta" underlined Poland's positive economic balance, its stable political situation, and added that at the time it was not technocrat Mario Monti but full-blooded politicians such as Tusk and Sikorski who led Europe having learnt it in practice. Gnauck quoted after "Gazeta": "German discipline is necessary, but without citizens' and markets' trust, the European Union cannot move forward". Gnauck also noticed that in the debate some ghosts from the past returned like the looming threat of the "fourth Reich", the buy-out of Polish enterprises, and the two-speed Europe. What Gnauck appreciated in Sikorski's approach, which consisted in supporting the establishment of the joint foundation – *European Endowment for Democracy*, stabilising Polish-German neighbourhood further and solidifying EU successes, was Sikorski's self-confidence and sense of responsibility.[35]

ECONOMY

Poland, upon taking over the Presidency from Hungary, seemed satisfied with its not belonging to the Monetary Union – wrote "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" three days after the opening celebrations of the Polish Presidency. At a conference held in Warsaw for Brussels journalists, all members of the Polish government, led by Minister of Economy Waldemar Pawlak, made it clear that the attitude of Eurozone members toward applicant countries changed markedly. Journalists did not find any scepticism toward the Eurozone but the statement of the Prime Minister made it clear that Poland was in favour of adopting the common currency as soon as possible and not necessarily upon meeting the Maastricht criteria, as the Eurozone countries did not meet them at the time. Minister Rostowski announced that the principles laid down by the International Monetary Fund would be promoted during the Polish Presidency, as the IMF was better suited to adjusting aid programmes to the needs of particular states. The critical condition of the Eurozone, according to "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", forced the Polish government, as the representative of Member States outside the Eurozone, to actively participate in discussions on further economic reforms.

"Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" also noticed that Donald Tusk openly stated that Poland had good experience in economic reforms, and as the only country not hit by the recession had the right to share its expertise with other states in times of crisis. It underlined that as much as 80% of the Polish society had an approving

[35] *Ibid.*

attitude to the EU which was the highest percentage in EU Member States. Quoting Donald Tusk, it was noted that in the 2007 elections Polish voters were capable to "control nationalism".[36]

"Der Spiegel" ascribed Poland's economic success to its stable political situation, its ambitious people and EU funds thanks to which Poland, unlike any other state, enjoyed its "an unending boom".[37] Poland's achievements, from the German perspective, seemed valuable but incomprehensible. To start with, in Poland its GPD grew by 1.7% while the rest of Europe was immersed in crisis. After Poland joined the EU, unemployment rates in Poland decreased from 20% to 8% and in Warsaw and Poznań unemployment rates were next to none. From a European point of view, the above data and Poles' satisfaction were sufficient reasons for adopting a truly optimistic outlook. In pronouncements on Poland in all German media one could sense a relief and contentment, to quote "Der Spiegel": "that provincial, backward, deeply Catholic, mainly rural area between the Oder and the Bug, Europe's ball and chain, does no longer irritate Brussels with its unpredictability [...] and the 38 million nation has become the recognised regional power".[38]

After the summit of EU leaders in Brussels (17-18 October 2011), where the decision to lower Greece's debt was taken, "Der Spiegel" wondered whether the Eurozone was still attractive for Poles. Marek Belka, "the currency defender", as read the caption under the photograph of the head of the National Bank of Poland, ensured the weekly of Poland's involvement in the EU and interest in sustaining a strong and stable euro. The collapse of the single currency would be a disaster for Poland. Professor Belka was interviewed by Jan Puhl who noted that Poland's eastern neighbours, i.e. Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, had already introduced painful cost reduction programmes which did not caused strong protests like in Spain and Greece. This phenomenon of patience was explained by Belka to result from a different approach to the crisis. States of the former Eastern Bloc had not been "pampered with prosperity", they were not afraid of painful, but reasonable reforms. Belka quoted the words of a citizen of Latvia: "Crisis? The real crisis was when the Soviets deported our people to Siberia".[39]

"Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" publishes, on its tenth page, biographies of prominent personalities of the world of politics and culture. One of such articles was on the head of the Polish Presidency, Donald Tusk. Its author, Konrad Schuller, titled it meaningfully *One for All,* and described Tusk's life as a model biography of a European born in European Gdańsk in the year when the Treaties of Rome came into force. A member of the underground Solidarity opposition, Tusk like millions of Poles fought against the communist regime, shouting "all for one and one for all", which later on became the motto of the EU. It was underlined that Tusk's European career

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[36] *Polen sieht den Euro noch nicht reif für einen Beitritt*, FAZ 04.07.2011, p. 13.
[37] J. Puhl, *Die ehrgeizige Nation*, "Der Spiegel" 21.02.2011, p. 102.
[38] *Ibidem*, p. 103.
[39] *Die Tabus fallen*, "Der Spiegel" 31.10.2011, p. 95.

was not an easy one. Konrad Schuller recalled that when the nationalist-conservative group of the Kaczyński brothers blocked the process of European integration, Tusk was not always against it and commented coldly on the Lisbon Treaty. Upon assuming the office of Prime Minister in 2007, Tusk rejected the euroscepticism of the Polish political right, as – according to Schuller – he "understood that backed by Europe, Poland can become an equal partner to its feared neighbour, Russia, and that Brussels is not only the source of the stream of euros flowing into the Polish budget".[40] For Tusk, Europe was the best place on earth, an example for other countries and the dream of many. Tusk promised that Poland would be an example of solidarity throughout its Presidency. The article ended with an ironic remark: "were it not for the protection of Polish coal and the only European veto against the climate goals of the European Commission, one could even believe him".[41]

While commenting on Tusk's speech to the European Parliament that inaugurated the Polish Presidency, the most stunning phrase cited was: "the more Europe, the less crisis". It was written that the Prime Minister would not allow for doubting the European project that was the dream of millions of people living beyond the EU borders. "This is the best place on earth, nobody has come up with anything better yet" and "the wave of illegal migration is indicative of this, everyone heads for Europe, not the other way round" – these words of the Prime Minister were quoted by the press. In response to the reintroduction of internal control in the Schengen Area by Denmark, Donald Tusk advocated the strengthening of the Frontex Agency. "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" in a short two-column article listed the "wishes" of the Polish Prime Minister for the Presidency: sustaining "a secure Europe" thanks to its defence policy, energy security policies, food and natural resources safety, building "an open Europe", cooperating with eastern and southern neighbours and signing the Association Agreement with Ukraine. The newspaper also drew attention to the fact that one of the priorities of the Polish Presidency was to develop the single market and eliminate barriers to e-trade.[42]

The word "crisis", which overshadowed the Polish Presidency, was omnipresent at all European forums where European future and unity were debated and decided upon. From the German perspective, Polish economic successes and Poles' satisfaction were important *vis-à-vis* the frustration of euro-Europeans. Poland's twenty-year-long path to modernisation of communist public structures was discussed, and its optimism and self-confidence were admired. "Poland, like never before, has a good hand in Europe"[43] and the capacity to lead the European Union – underlined "Die Zeit" weekly. By publishing an article written by a Polish journalist, "Die Zeit" called for abandoning stereotypes, as "Poland is the most stable state in crisis-ridden Europe", and the times of *polnische Wirtschaft* are long gone by.[44]

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[40] K. Schuller, *Einer für alle*, FAZ 04.07.2011, p. 10.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] *Tusk: Mehr Europa, weniger Krise*, FAZ 07.07.2011, p. 4.

[43] P. Buras, *Nichts ohne uns*, "Die Zeit" 08.12.2011, p. 9.

[44] P. Buras, *Polen, so cool*, "Die Zeit" 28.07.2011, p. 11.

On 16 September 2011, at an informal meeting of EU finance ministers in Wrocław, it was agreed that a decision to disburse another tranche of financial aid to Greece would be taken in October 2011. Athens was to receive EUR 8 billion. "Nothing new, the uncertainty and nervousness of financial markets will persist" – read the commentary in "Süddeutsche Zeitung".[45] American Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner pressed for more efficient cooperation between the governments of European countries and the European Central Bank. His remarks were explicitly addressed to Berlin. In his opinion, Europeans should follow the example of the American bail-out programme that in 2008, after the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, resorted to the Federal Reserve. He expressed the view that the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) might not be enough to support financial institutions, enterprises and countries at the same time. That statement irritated the Eurogroup. Austrian Finance Minister Maria Fekter underlined that it would be not right to put the entire burden on the shoulders of taxpayers. She considered it to be odd that "the USA, despite their high debts, teach us what to do, and do not listen to any explanations".[46]

The adoption of the so-called legislative six-pack was a success of the Polish Presidency and the Wrocław meeting. The initiative would allow for more effective discipline in those EU Member States that exceed the 3% deficit threshold and whose public debt is higher than 60%. Strengthening the criterion of debt was of particular importance. Until then, the public debt criterion played a much less significant role than the deficit criterion. The change allowed to introduce a correction to the Pact for Stability and Growth and extended the possibilities of imposing sanctions on Eurozone members for failure to adhere to the rules and principles of budget policy. The process of imposing sanctions was to be simplified and become more effective, and the role of the European Commission was to be strengthened in the area of surveillance. The European Commission was to check once a year whether Member States display any symptoms of growing imbalance, and the states that fail to adhere to the rules would automatically be punished with sanctions.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESIDENCY

It is hard to find a review of the Polish Presidency in the German press. Commentaries by experts and politicians from various countries might shed some light on the evaluation of the Presidency. Cornelius Ochmann, analyst from the Bertelsmann Foundation, observed that Berlin and Brussels think higher of the Polish Presidency than Warsaw itself. According to Ochmann, it was quite an achievement of Poland to adopt the six-pack and end negotiations with Croatia. It was highly important that Poland managed to maintain the unity of the EU and took actions that protected the

[45] N. Piper, *Einmischen erlaubt*, SZ 17/18.09.2011, p. 4.
[46] C. Gammelin, *Forderungen der USA verärgern Euro-Staaten*, SZ 17/18.09.2011, p. 1.

EU from splitting into the Eurozone and the remaining Member States. Finnish Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen underlined Polish efforts at ECOFIN meetings and emphasised that Poland pursued European policies through hard work and did not focus on its own agenda only. In the opinion of Professor Alan Mayhew from the Sussex European Institute, during its Presidency Poland strengthened its position as a key decision maker in the EU, and its skill of establishing alliances with other Member States was impressive. All journalists tried to comprehensively explain the fiasco of the Eastern Partnership summit held in September and Ukraine's drifting away from the European Union (that problem was encountered by all Presidencies).[47]

German commentators underlined Poland's position on energy security, where Poland was in favour of the EU's close cooperation with Ukraine. The reason why previous attempts of the EU to promote reforms in Ukraine failed, was sought in the lack of a comprehensive "lighthouse project" aimed at the whole post-Soviet area that would help convince other states that democratisation of the society provides better conditions for economic growth.[48]

Can one say, after Polish rightist commentators, that the Polish Presidency was not visible? Taking into account that the Presidency time was a difficult period for the EU, Poland decided to pursue a policy of supporting, winning trust and delineating new necessary trends for the good and the future of the brave European community project. The Polish administration coped well with the logistics and organisation of expert and ministerial meetings. The fact that Polish Presidency was not widely and vividly commented upon, that there were no scandals and unexpected turns or changes (also in the Polish government) proves that Polish political elites and Poles themselves are mature Europeans. As a journalist of "Gazeta Wyborcza" aptly noted, one should appreciate that "now Poland's greatest asset in the EU is its normality".[49]

CONCLUSIONS

One might have expected that the Polish Presidency of the EU Council would attract the interest of German press, especially newspapers with experienced correspondents and specialists in Polish affairs, who would diligently follow not only politicians' speeches and conferences but also informal meetings of ministers of Member States and cultural events accompanying the Presidency. This, however, was not the case. The few articles on the Polish Presidency first surprised readers, then evoked disbelief, and finally became food for thought. This resulted from a couple of reasons. Poland is no longer an unruly child that causes trouble and requires special care. It is not a country of political uncertainty any more. Polish affairs do

[47] *Co zostanie z polskiej prezydencji*, GW 29.12.2011, p. 19.
[48] G. Gnauck, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[49] J. Pawlicki, *Prezydencja cicha, ale skuteczna*, GW 29.11.2011, p. 22.

not attract as much attention as they did during the political transformation time. In the press, issues related to the Far East, the rising economic giants of South America and the transforming Arab states prevailed. In line with the principle that lack of comments is also a comment, one can assume that Poland is perceived now as a normal, predictable, economically and politically stable country located in the centre of Europe. It is also worth recalling that the Lisbon Treaty limited the competencies of the Presidency in the scope of the EU external policy and therefore its role is not as significant as it used to be.

During the Presidency, Poland presented its culture, customs and cuisine to the European Union. One must hope that the exhibition on 15th-18th century Poland held at the Royal Palace in Madrid and the world première of *Planet Lem* under the Royal National Theatre in London outdoor series were attractive to Europeans interested in culture. German society had many opportunities to meet with Polish culture and art, and those events were far more numerous than the media reported.

ABSTRACT

The article presents commentaries of German press on the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The analysis spans German national daily newspapers and weeklies examined in chronological order with focus on the crucial thematic content and political events. Poland held the Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2011 at a time of crisis, growing Euro-scepticism, the threat of a division of Europe into two speeds, and the coming parliamentary elections in Poland. The course of the Presidency, achievement of pre-set goals, a pro-European tone of the statements of Polish politicians and unsuccessful attempts to deepen the idea of Eastern Partnership became the object of a critical yet factual assessment of German journalists. Eastern policy priorities oriented at increasing its effectiveness had to be modified, but they can still be achieved in the future.