



POLISH EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY 2011 AND THE COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY: CZECH EXPECTATIONS AND COOPERATION OPPORTUNITIES

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The Polish EU Council presidency has been under preparation for several years. The Poles have not underestimated the responsibility that they are going to have in the second half of 2011. Moreover, Poland wants to make a good impression, after the rather wobbly presidencies of other “newer” member states.

In Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) the role of the presidency is, however, fairly limited. As in most Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) areas, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (hereafter High Representative) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have taken over the responsibilities of the rotating presidency. Theoretically, the country holding the rotating presidency is just one among twenty-seven in the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and a large part of the subordinated Working Parties. This has been clearly visible during the Hungarian presidency, which declared itself a “supportive presidency” and left the initiative in CFSP area fully with the High Representative.

At the same time, the job of the High Representative is a vast one, combining responsibilities of

several persons from the pre-Lisbon era, and she has to delegate part of her work on other people. Moreover, the EEAS was only established at the beginning of 2011 and it has not been fully operational yet with a significant number of vacancies in important positions high in the structure. As a result, there is a room for an active rotating presidency to share part of the responsibility with the High Representative and her service. Apparently, Poland does want to use that opportunity and it has agreed with Catherine Ashton on a number of initiatives that the presidency will be putting forward with the EEAS’s formal leadership. Therefore, it still makes sense to evaluate Poland’s priorities in CSDP area.

Expected Priorities of the Polish Presidency

The official programme of the Polish Presidency was approved by the Polish government in late May, with only a press release made public so far. Security scores high in Polish priorities – besides economics and focus on the neighbourhood, “Secure Europe” is one of the three basic priorities of the presidency.



Yet, defence policy creates only a small part of the “Secure Europe” priority. A number of other issues are considered security according to the Poles. A lot of attention will be paid to energy security, which has been a crucial issue for Poland for a long time. Logically, financial issues are mentioned, although one has to wonder why “macro-economic security” should blur the conceptual coherence of this priority. Maybe, it just paves the way to “food security”, disguising another topic close to the Polish heart, the Common Agricultural Policy, pictured as a necessary tool for Europe’s security. The border security and the amendment of the Warsaw-based Frontex agency is a comfortable return to the more traditional area of security in this context.

The press release on presidency programme is rather brief in terms of CSDP plans. It includes two priorities that are pretty uncontroversial and have been part of the European discourse for quite some time. Firstly, Poland would like to take further steps in “the strengthening of military and civil EU capabilities”. Capabilities have been discussed since the very launch of the ESDP/CSDP in 1999 and a new initiative of Pooling & Sharing was launched during the Belgian presidency in 2010. Secondly, Poland wants to “support actions towards the consolidation of direct EU-NATO dialogue”. The non-existent EU-NATO dialogue at the strategic level has been an issue since Cyprus joined the EU in 2004. The EU and NATO have been able to cooperate on ground, but not in Brussels due to the unresolved issues between Cyprus and Turkey. Regardless of the recent rapprochement between the two organisations over Libya, there is a very limited room for progress without a Cypriot-Turkish reconciliation. We cannot expect much from a presidency of the trio with Cyprus on board in particular.

The official priorities are very short and do not offer anything particularly innovative. By contrast, the more detailed steps likely to be embraced by the Polish presidency under these headings are much more interesting. The Poles are expected to focus on four subjects:

- Strengthening the EU Operations Centre and creation of the permanent operation headquarters. This process should be incremental and using existing institutions. The EU Operations Centre should be boosted by additional personnel and more co-operation should take place between the civilian and military, between the EU Military Staff (EUMS) and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC).
- Reviewing the concept of battlegroups. Possible ways of using the battlegroups in practice should be identified. Furthermore, an extension of the battlegroups’ period of readiness from six to twelve months should be discussed.
- Involving the EU Eastern partners into the CSDP. Combining two presidency priorities, Poland would like to establish a direct link between the CSDP and the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP).
- Intensifying the cooperation between the EU and NATO on the ground as well as on capabilities. Poland would like to use the momentum of Libya and push forward practical parts of cooperation circumventing the political deadlock.

Expected Positions of Key Actors

There are four actors in the EU that will be crucial to the success of the Polish plans in the CSDP: the High Representative and the EU-3. Other member states can veto the initiative anytime, but they usually follow a compromise between the UK, France and Germany. The High Representative is crucial, because she, together with her people, will chair the meetings officially.

The High Representative seems to support the Polish activity. She is apparently overloaded with her obligations and defence policy was one of the areas that she neglected from the very beginning. She has been criticised for her inaction by both



MEPs and member states. The Weimar Triangle declaration from December 2010 called for a more assertive role of the High Representative in defence policy, but her reaction was rather limited. The European military and humanitarian reaction to the crisis in Libya has proven to be a stronger impetus for activity though. The High Representative had to coordinate with NATO Secretary General Rasmussen and the two co-chaired a joint meeting of the Political and Security Committee and the North Atlantic Council on Libya in May 2011. The High Representative has not been very proactive in the framework of the CFSP so far. She has even been criticised by the MEPs that she relies excessively on the member states and their initiative. As a result we can expect her not to put any obstacles into the Polish way. Any new and successful initiative will be an asset for the High Representative's record in her job.

France and Germany are likely to support most of Polish proposals, most of which correspond with the priorities identified in the December 2010 letter by the Weimar Triangle, i.e. France, Germany and Poland. Especially the idea of the permanent operations headquarters in Brussels has been promoted by the French and the Germans ever since the first proposal of the "chocolate summit" in 2003. Similarly, after the recent French return into the NATO military structures, a more efficient cooperation between the two organizations has been important for all key stakeholders.

There may be some disagreements on details, however. For Germany, the clear separation of civilian and military management has been very important for historical and domestic legal reasons. Any subordination of civilian personnel to a military commander is unacceptable for Germany. The German support to a further fusion of the crisis management bodies within EEAS will therefore depend on the exact configuration.

The engagement of EaP countries in CSDP might be controversial with both countries, although for different reasons. For France, the Southern neighbourhood is a clear priority and the Arab Spring has made it ever more important. Any extra time

spent on Eastern neighbourhood and/or potential clashes with Russia over the understanding of any such EU offer to the EaP countries might be regarded as time wasted. For Germany, which supports the EU's activity in the Eastern neighbourhood more strongly, the potential clash with Russia might be an unwanted by-product too. Especially in the context of the latest German decision to shut down all its nuclear power plants, Germany might not be willing to antagonize Russia over an issue that is more symbolic than essential.

The United Kingdom might turn out to be the most important obstacle in Polish efforts to boost the CSDP. A full support might be expected in some areas, such as the re-definition of the battlegroups' tasks and the strengthening of the EU-NATO cooperation. Both objectives would contribute to a more efficient security policy of the EU, which would simultaneously be more harmonised with NATO activities. The position of the UK to the EaP's countries engagement in the CSDP might turn out both ways. On the one hand, the UK has supported the cooperation with the Eastern neighbours on defence and has never paid much attention to Russia's objections. On the other hand, the British foreign and defence policy has traditionally been connected with the Southern Mediterranean and the UK is strongly engaged in the current military operations in the region. Like France, the UK might see focus on the EaP as an unwanted distraction from the real problems that should be tackled.

A British opposition to the strengthening of the EU operations centre can be expected. The UK was the most vocal opponent of the "chocolate summit" proposal and it was the compromise between the UK on one side and France and Germany on the other that gave rise to the EU Operations Centre as it works today. The UK criticism of a full-fledged EU operations centre has been based on the non-duplicity with NATO clause in all CSDP documents. According to the UK, the European security policy should lead to better spending on European defence, which means both EU and NATO, and there already is the Berlin Plus option for using the SHAPE for planning the EU operations. Furthermore, the present time is not particularly favour-



able for any significant shift in the British position. The conservative government with the right-wing defence minister who just had to conduct severe cuts in the country's defence budget is very unlikely to support any boost in EU defence institutions, especially if it required extra costs.

There are also other internal and external actors that might influence the decision-making in the EU in the framework of CSDP. Russia has already been mentioned. The United States would probably be very supportive in all areas that might increase the efficiency of EU defence spending and/or increasing the deployability of EU the forces. The US might be expected to support a closer cooperation between the EaP countries and the EU too. The Americans would be, however, very cautious about a permanent operations centre, largely in accord with the British.

The most important players regarding the EU-NATO cooperation are obviously Turkey and Cyprus. There are elections in both countries recently (22 May in Cyprus and 12 June in Turkey) and a lot will depend on their results. However, neither a solution to the Cypriot problem nor a significant shift in position of either side can be expected until and during the Polish presidency.

Expected Czech Positions and Interests – Overlap with Polish Priorities

On most issues, the Czech Republic can be expected to support the Polish plans. A good cooperation between the EU and NATO has always been one of the key Czech foreign policy priorities. Similarly, the Eastern EU neighbourhood is one of Czech priority regions. It was during the Czech presidency that the Swedish-Polish plan for Eastern Partnership was materialized. The Czech support to bringing the EaP countries closer to the EU in security and defence can be expected.

Concerning the battlegroups, the Czechs would probably support plans for re-defining their tasks. The Czech military cannot afford training troops or

units that have no use, which has partly been the case with the battlegroups. If the battlegroups are re-defined according to current needs in the EU neighbourhood where the EU already has got CSDP missions, such as Kosovo or Bosnia, they may even strengthen the EU-NATO cooperation and decrease the pressure on states that are members of both organisations.

The Czechs can be expected to be cautious about the permanent EU operations centre. The reasons are two-fold. Firstly, the Czech budget, the MoD budget in particular, cannot cover any additional costs. If there were extra costs involved, the Czech Republic would probably disagree with the proposal. Secondly, the Czech Republic has been one of the traditionally more sceptic countries towards the CSDP. Its defence policy is fully built on NATO (even if the strategic documents mention both NATO and the EU as the pillars of Czech security). If the permanent operations centre turns out to be a problem for NATO or being a duplication of NATO assets, the Czechs will most probably oppose its expansion. A better coordination between the civilian and military crisis management is, however, in Czech interest, because the country sends both military and the police/civilians to CSDP missions. Better coordination might increase the efficiency of EU engagement and decrease its length, thus saving money and manpower.

Conclusions – Opportunities for Czech-Polish Cooperation

There is some room for cooperation between the Polish presidency and the Czech Republic. Especially in areas where the presidency priorities match Czech interests, the cooperation might be fruitful and the Czech support might in certain ways relieve pressure on the presidency. A productive coordination advantageous for both sides might, however, be possible also on issues, where the Czechs maintain their scepticism.

A particularly useful cooperation might develop in the area of Eastern Partnership and the effort to engage the EaP partners more in the CSDP. With



their interests clearly overlapping in the area, the Czechs and the Poles are natural allies. As many EU countries would prefer focusing on the Southern neighbourhood only, a great deal of pressure and backstage effort will be needed to push the issue on the agenda and to win support from both the High Representative and other states.

Recommendation 1: The Czech Republic should help the Polish presidency in backstage negotiations. The Czech Republic should build like-minded countries in support of the presidency. The Polish presidency should rely on the Czech support and share timely information that may help the Czech Republic in building the coalition.

The Czech Republic and Poland already cooperate in military matters. Military cooperation has been discussed in Visegrad Group for some time and there is a V4 battlegroup planned for 2016. This battlegroup might prove the readiness of the Polish presidency to implement its own proposals and that there are countries that are ready to actually use the battlegroups they create.

Recommendation 2: The Czech Republic and Poland, together with Hungary and Slovakia, should declare their readiness to build the V4 battlegroup according to the new tasks. They should identify the possible use of the battlegroup, such as a support unit for KFOR or emergency enforcement troops for Bosnia. They should declare that the battlegroup would be ready to be on standby for 12 months and adjust the planning accordingly.

There is a limited room for cooperation over the extended EU Operations Centre. The Czech Republic can be expected to be one of the countries that will have to be persuaded about the plans. The Czech position is very close to the British position on this issue, with the main Czech government party being one of the closest allies of the British conservatives in the European Parliament. It can, thus, serve the Polish presidency exactly from the position of an opponent and provide a “reality check” for presidency’s plans before they are unveiled to other member states.

Recommendation 3: The Polish presidency should discuss proposals concerning the modes of expansion of the EU Operations Centre and use the debate as a preparation for the more severe debates at the EU level.



This paper has been developed in the framework of project “The Polish EU Presidency 2011: Expectations of the Czech Republic and possibilities of cooperation” supported by the Czech - Polish Forum.



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