

POLISH PRIORITIES FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

CORDELIA BUCHANAN PONCZEK
FINNISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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In January 2025, Poland will take on the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). It is the largest country of the upcoming Council presidency trio, and it will take over during the start of the new Commission. Poland's priorities are no doubt shaped by the global events – the new US president, the ongoing war in Ukraine, the instrumentalisation of migration and concerns over EU security – while also reflecting the needs of the incoming Commission and its legislative agenda. Beyond this, the Polish presidential election will occur during its presidency period, which could bring its own risks.

In January 2025, Poland will take on the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). Though the Lisbon Treaty reduced the role of the Council presidency, it often entails high expectations and a lot of visibility, especially for larger Member States. This is particularly true for Poland's Council presidency, as Poland takes the position at the beginning of a new Commission; it is also the largest member of the presidency trio – where it is joined by Denmark and Cyprus – over the next one-and-a-half years. The Council presidency is about setting the tone and agenda – an opportunity to focus EU attention on Poland's point of view. This will be Poland's second presidency since it joined the EU in 2004; the first was in 2011. It is a tall task: the first presidency of the incoming Commission is considered by some to be the most challenging, not to mention that Poland will take on the presidency as Donald Trump

returns to the White House. There is a great deal of pressure on Poland to improve upon the Hungarian presidency, especially because many legislative procedures will be opened and there is a feeling of uncertainty – which brings risks and opportunities. Generally speaking, there is a desire among those in the EU for a return to norms and efficiency (including a smooth start to the legislative agenda).

A multi-pronged agenda with a turbulent backdrop

At the end of 2024, Poland released an updated list of its priorities: Seven dimensions linked by a common theme of security. This builds on the list of priorities established last year by the outgoing government, led by the Law and Justice (PiS) party, which were close cooperation between the EU and the USA; enlargement, including reconstruction of Ukraine; and energy security. The new government has since added one more, comprehensive security, a topic that has been highlighted in the [recent Niinistö report](#). This brief draws on the long-standing priorities and weaves in the aspects of the most recent detailed priorities list.

The transatlantic relationship

The first goal of the Polish EU presidency is to [strengthen transatlantic ties](#). The problem is that, internally, Poland has already been giving mixed signals on this. The elephant in the room is that Polish political parties disagree on their position towards Trump and, as a consequence, towards the USA. In his address on [Polish foreign policy tasks](#) in April 2024, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski of the now-ruling party, Civic Coalition, emphasised that Poland's path is through the EU, especially the Nordic-Baltic corridor. Meanwhile, the PiS party of outgoing Polish President Andrzej Duda has pinned some of their [hopes for revival](#) on Trump's

success – Duda was among the first to congratulate Trump on his re-election. Certainly, the bilateral relationship between the USA and Poland has remained strong through all the previous US presidencies and successive Polish governments. Nonetheless, Trump and his stated desire for isolationism might spark concern in Poland. Europe will want to remain strong and unified while avoiding upsetting Trump. Then again, Polish EU policy is led by the government, not the president – President Duda plays no role in the Council or European Council – so the view of PiS should matter less here. Beyond this, there is a hope that the Polish government will realise what is at stake and act in the European interest to preserve unity. The Polish government has been coordinating a group of EU countries aiming to continue strong support for Ukraine. While unity is the main goal, workable solutions are also necessary.

Enlargement and reconstruction

On enlargement and the reconstruction of Ukraine, Poland will be presented with an opportunity to discuss how Europe can lead on matters of its own importance, especially when faced with the risk (or likelihood) of an absence of US leadership or its unilateralism. When it comes to defence and support from Ukraine, Poland seems to have a sense of moral authority to lead that conversation. Still, there are practical matters that will need to be addressed. Last year, Polish farmers vehemently protested against transit and storage of Ukrainian grain: now, some have mentioned Poland's desire to return Ukraine to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, which would be a step down in integration from Ukraine's current Autonomous Trade Measures. The latter include the [suspension of import duties](#) on Ukrainian goods to the EU; while they have been an important measure for the EU to support Ukraine, they are very unpopular in Poland. So, while Poland might want to steer the conversation in the EU towards enlargement, there are serious and prickly questions that it will need to address.

Energy security

Poland has placed its focus on the security of supply issues as well as ensuring the principles of a fair energy transition to leave no one behind. Poland is a country with a pervasive legacy of mining – especially coal mining – that has been difficult to phase out. Recently, Poland has drawn on specific funds to simultaneously phase out coal and meet the needs of communities where coal mining is a key part of the identity and economic livelihood; this includes a [EUR 300 million program](#) approved by the European Commission. Poland is also keen, together with the Baltic countries and some Nordic countries, to develop its nuclear program, especially through US-led [Small Modular Reactors](#). Aside from the shift away from coal and the importance of diversification, Poland has also emphasised the importance of protecting critical infrastructure as part of 'energy security' – security of supply. This especially includes the Baltic Sea, as Poland has several projects coming online. In that respect, the new [NATO Naval base in Rostock](#), Germany, which will include German, Polish, and Swedish navies, along with staff from the Baltic countries, is notable as a starting point on EU-NATO cooperation in such an important topic. Now, through the Council presidency, Poland will be able to reshape parts of the conversation on energy security to develop the EU's definitions and approaches. So far, Poland has not been known as Europe's low-carbon or energy transition champion. Indeed, the country has long been acting as a spoiler on the European Green Deal, and there is still a risk that it will try to use the presidency to lower EU energy transition ambitions by refocusing the discussion on 'security' rather than climate protection.

Comprehensive security

Though it is the last, most recently added priority, the comprehensive security element is by no means the least of Poland's aims. Indeed, as it was the one most reinforced by the last list of priorities, it is perhaps the most important.

especially to the current government, and one likely to be received well by most EU Member States. The Polish government's definition of 'security' in this case is quite broad – it goes beyond traditional military security definitions to include wider security, like disinformation, economic security, and even environmental security. Poland would want to take meaningful steps on defence and security, including the introduction of border management. This emphasis on the enforcement of the EU's external border is likely to be well-received by most. Poland has proposed its East Shield ([Tarcza Wschód](#)) which is to reinforce the borders with Belarus and Kaliningrad. The East Shield proposal includes physical elements to prevent and deter border crossings as well as the use of surveillance systems. Poland has already received significant support from Member States belonging to NATO, including the Baltic states. Certainly, a country like Finland, which has also experienced instrumentalised migration, will see the importance of fortifying the border with Russia. And other EU Member States that are facing migration issues will see the value in moving the discussion on the ways to fortify the EU's external border—as there is generally agreement on the need to secure the external border, the means may differ.

On other defense matters, the PiS government has left a paradoxical legacy: On the one hand, it strove to keep Poland distant from European power centres—something the current government is working to reverse. On the other hand, PiS also pioneered Poland's high defence spending, something that the current government would like to continue, and could use as a demonstration for other EU (and NATO) members. Although it was among the first to act, Poland's leadership position on military support for Ukraine has diminished.

Support during the presidency: Logistics, training and scheduling

Beyond priorities, there are tangible ways in which the holder of the presidency exerts influence: they will chair meetings of the Council, determine agendas, establish the work program, and facilitate discussions among others. This all requires advance planning and efficient execution.

This second Polish presidency is highly organised: there is a preliminary official schedule [a website](#), and a bureau to coordinate the preparation of the presidency. The logo was created by artist Jerzy Janiszewski, the same artist who designed the world-famous "Solidarity" script. The more detailed priorities were released at the end of November, and the events calendar is expected to be released at the end of December. One way that Poland can shape the agenda is through the number of formal and informal meetings the presidency will hold; such meetings are especially relevant at the start of the new legislature. There are plans for a joint tri-president meeting among the leadership of the Council presidency trio, which has a joint one-and-a-half year agenda that Poland will start at the same time as the new Commission. This makes the joint programme – and meetings to build and facilitate such a programme – an important undertaking.

Former Polish Permanent Representative to the EU Piotr Serafin was approved for the position of European Commissioner for Budget, anti-fraud and public administration. He reports directly to President Ursula von der Leyen. This is both a service and a disservice to Poland. Serafin is a well-respected and effective Polish diplomat. The commissioners serve the interests of the EU as a whole, rather than those of their Member States. It is yet to be seen how influential Serafin will be in his position. While the budget for the new Commission is already set, the Commission

is expected to provide a proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-34) in the summer of 2025, which is hugely important. Serafin, alongside von der Leyen, could play a large role in this. Serafin's nomination brought Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk – no stranger to the machinations of Brussels politics – to appoint a new Permanent Representative, [Agnieszka Bartol-Saurel](#), who has a background on the Multiannual Financial Framework and with the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. For the issue of the EU Council presidency, the effectiveness of the Permanent Representation is an important aspect because the permanent representatives prepare the Council meetings. Poland has already been preparing for the presidency: over the summer, Poland already sent over 100 extra diplomatic staff to Brussels for training in anticipation.

Domestic considerations

This could be – and is even likely to be – the last presidency in which Poland is a net receiver of EU funds rather than a net contributor, which is bound to have repercussions on domestic approval for the EU among Poles. While it might be a stretch to say that Poland is Eurosceptic in the same manner as the United Kingdom (which left the EU) or Hungary (which has repeatedly blocked EU measures and challenged rule of law norms), there is a high risk of waning support for the EU among Polish society, especially if Poles perceive they might be 'getting less' from the EU membership than they are having to 'give out', which could be problematic.

This is in addition to general protests and expressed frustrations over EU policy, such as [farmers protesting](#) elements of the European Green Deal. The current domestic coalition government, led by Civic Coalition, is mostly

bound together by its distaste for PiS and other parties to the right, like *Konfederacja*.

The Polish presidential election will happen during the presidency semester. National elections during an EU presidency can be a risk of distraction for the government, but other Member States have successfully combined both in the past. Poland's brings no risk that the government will change. Still, though Polish EU policy is led by the government and not the president, disagreement between Duda and Civic Coalition over transatlantic policy and other matters could play a role during the presidential election campaign. This would increase the incentives for the government to define its transatlantic policy based on domestic considerations and raise the possibility of conflict with the common European interest.

Ready to get to work

Tusk has a close relationship with Commission President von der Leyen, and this could also play out during the Polish presidency period. Expectations are high for an active first 100 days of the new von der Leyen Commission. Should this pan out, a number of significant pieces of legislation could be in the European Parliament and Council within the first few months of 2025, and thus it would fall on Poland's Council presidency to start the work on these. And while such legislation might only be passed later, during the Council presidency of Cyprus or Denmark, Poland would have the opportunity to share the tone of the first crucial meetings, which includes steering the conversation and identifying elements for consensus. This is a lot of responsibility. There are certainly [recommendations](#) that the Polish government should strongly consider taking on board. The bottom line is that Poland is showing up prepared and well-positioned to steer the discussion. In response, other EU Member States should arrive with their sleeves rolled up, ready to get to work despite – or because of – the period of [tumult](#) that is fast approaching.

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Cordelia Buchanan Ponczek is a researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs' European Union Programme and a doctoral candidate at the University of Oxford. She previously worked at the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the Center for European Policy Analysis.

