

Another 'Motor' of European Integration? Poland's EU-Council Presidency under Scrutiny

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COLLECTIVE REVIEW

Beate Neuss, and Antje Nötzold. (Eds.). (2013). Polen als Motor des europäischen Integrationsprozesses: Bilanz der polnischen Ratspräsidentschaft and Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski, Thomas Mehlhausen, and Monika Sus. (Eds.). (2014). Poland's EU-Council Presidency under Evaluation: Navigating Europe through Stormy Waters.

I. Scope

Over a half decade ago, *Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft* published in 2006 (in German) Simone Weske's title that deemed Germany and France being a 'motor' of European integration, particularly in security and defence affairs [1]. After a series of critics in European public, political and academic discourses regarding the malfunction or at best 'stuttering' of the Franco-German 'motor', the indispensable nature of Europe's traditional leading duo got incrementally challenged. This challenge has been even greater substantiated following the arduously digestible enlargements of 2004 and 2007, heavily hitting constitutional, economic and financial crises, just as the sharpening of EU's perennial malaise in security and defence affairs, etc. It was thus inescapable that a greater Europe would be looking for a 'motor' with more cylinders, or even a new one, to keep it moving towards both deeper and wider integration. Eye cast over, Poland was quickly identified among the 2004 EU-newbies as one of the large-sized member states that is well connected to both old and new Europe as well as to countries beyond the EU's eastern boundaries.

Nearly as swiftly, skepticism got to accompany the high hopes for the Polish performance in EU affairs, not least for its post-communist past. Poland's Presidency of the EU Council in 2011 provided an opportunity for a fine-tuned performance check – both politically and academically. *Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft*, again, boldly opened the debate on the nature of the (re)new(ed) 'motor' of European integration by the successive publication of two closely related titles – a 2013 investigation into the Polish driving force for the European integration process (in German), and a 2014 evaluation of the EU Council Presidency (in English). The timing for the publication of these books is just right – it is still hot but mature enough to allow necessary time for research and reflection. Their order of appearance (and thus mutual 'learning' and complementarity) could have been reversed however, for I believe the fine-grained evaluation of the Polish Presidency of the EU Council would have well informed the broader examination of the country's role in European integration, which, too, is largely derived

from the Polish performance during the 2011 Presidency. Given that these two titles are published by the same house, and that the authorship overlaps to a certain extent, one may assume that the necessary scholarly communication and knowledge exchange has duly underlain the rationale of the books.

Although sharing some similar features – both structure and content-related, the titles also manifest each a significant degree of originality and 'autonomy'. The German-language book edited by Beate Neuss and Antje Nötzold (for Table of Contents click [here](#)) consists of ten chapters falling into three main parts that cover a general examination of Poland's role in the European Union (part I), the Polish EU Council Presidency itself (part II), and the performance of the Polish-German tandem in Europe (part III). By contrast, the English-language title edited by Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski, Thomas Mehlhausen, and Monika Sus (for Table of Contents click [here](#)) encompasses a single-level structure and thus consists of ten alone-standing chapters. Although analytically, one could also split the latter book into three parts – firstly, sketching the analysis framework (chapters one to three), secondly, examining the Polish EU Council Presidency (chapters four to nine), and thirdly, providing an evaluative summary of the country's performance in the European Union (chapter ten). It should be emphasized at the outset that both titles, albeit featuring embedded case studies of Poland's EU Council Presidency, follow different paths of analysis and presentation, and thus cover different policy and politics domains, while also featuring some moderate overlaps. Speaking of those, both books – rather well expectedly – focus on the grand theme of Polish EU politics: the Eastern Partnership.

At the same time, the German title entails three original chapters in this context – Iwona Kozłowska's broad focus on the Polish operating field during EU Presidency, Matthias Niedobitek's take on the Polish Presidency performance in the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ), and Stefan Garsztecki's insight into the EU's cohesion policy, field-relevant Europeanization and the agency of Polish regions. Notably, the English title reveals five more tenets of the Polish Presidency's input to the multi-level politics of the European Union. For instance, Ernest Wyciszekiewicz reveals in chapter 5 the dilemmatic agency of Poland (honest broker vs self-centered president) in energy and climate policy; Monika Sus explores in chapter 6 the back seat brokerage practices of Poland in CFSP matters; Paweł Tokarski advocates in chapter 7 the old-new highlight of EU single market policy as a window of opportunity for Poland; Janusz Józef Węc deliberates in chapter 8 on the (im)possibility of further EU enlargements, and on the Polish role in streamlining the current and future debates during its 2011 Presidency; finally, Mario Kölling complements the trend analysis by revealing the peculiarities and future implications of the negotiation of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, including the exploration of the limits for Poland of being an honest broker here.

Oddly, Thomas Mehlhausen and Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski's chapter on how to analyze the rotating EU Council Presidency, including the Polish case, which (contained in both books) opens the narrative of the English-language book, is somehow suggested to 'close' the debates featured on the Polish 2011 Presidency in the German-language book. Although valuable as an analytical guide itself, this chapter provides little help in Neuss/Nötzold's (2013) book, which, first, did not extensively focus on the matters of Polish EU Council Presidency, and, second, did not follow the analytical template presented in the chapter. Hence, this twin-chapter appears either superfluous in the German-language book, or just not in the right 'place'. One should however credit the Neuss/Nötzold title for its absolutely necessary part that distinctively focuses on the role(s)

of Poland and Germany in Europe (chapters eight to ten).

Finally, to end with the start, it should be highlighted that the two books depart from distinct political and analytical contexts. The German title sets out the historical (chapter one by Monika Sus) and socio-political (chapter two by Agnieszka Łada) contexts as the pretext for further – *broad* – inspection of the Polish role in the European integration process. Whereas the English title frames, at the outset, its analytical grid – a three-tier approach consisting of functional, behavioural and contingency analysis dimensions (chapter one by Thomas Mehlhausen and Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski); it also outlines the (geo)political and (geo)economic framework in which the exercise of Polish EU Council Presidency had to occur (chapter two by Piotr Maciej Kaczyński) as well as instantiates the institutional setting in which Poland was to operate at the stern of the European Union (chapter three by Anne Lauenroth and Nicolai von Ondarza). Such a level of analytical precision in the Karolewski et al.'s (2014) book is absolutely necessary for the intended – *narrow* – evaluation of the Polish role and performance during the EU Council Presidency. Roughly speaking, these two books could have well served as components of a single and solid analytical mechanism able to *zoom in* (i.e. cast a close look at the core topic addressed in both books – the Polish EU Council Presidency) and *zoom out* (i.e. cast a distant look at the implied broader topic of Polish role in the European Union, as revealed by the German-language title).

II. Content

In what follows, I will try to assess the content of these two well-written titles as if they were *the* one, by pointing to the claims and arguments advanced in each, respectively. I shall proceed by outlining comparatively how the *political and analytical context* in researching Poland's role and performance in European affairs is presented, then assessing the logic and comprehensiveness of the *Polish EU Council Presidency's* examinations, and finally deliberating on the 'new motor' discourse featured in the inspection of the *Polish-German role in Europe*.

Seven years after EU accession and nearly two years after the inaction of the Lisbon Treaty reforms, Poland took over the Presidency in the EU Council for the second half of 2011. Many were skeptical about any feasible deliverables otherwise normally expected at the year's closure. What mattered was not only the challenge for Poland to take, for the first time, the lead in the EU, but also the one stemming from abound uncertainties at the Union level itself – systemic crises, institutional and political resettlement and not least important, external threats. Ultimately, 'the Euro crisis threatened to overshadow the entire term and it was an open question as to whether Poland as a non-Euro member would be able to leave any mark on its term' (Mehlhausen and Karolewski in Karolewski et al. 2014, p. 9).

Given Poland's thorny road "back" to the European 'house' that it followed since 1989 and its notorious image as a 'troublemaker' (Sus in Neuss/Nötzold 2013, pp. 19–23), its maturity as an EU member and – what is more important – as a partner could hardly be taken for granted. It required proof, a reality check, if one may say so. This daunting task had to be managed not only by Polish policy makers and political elites active at the EU level, but also substantially supported and legitimized by the European and Polish societies themselves. Lacking the necessary knowledge on how to find their country's way in the Brussels' corridors, the Poles, having been in fact 'for many years one of the most enthusiastic nations about Europe' (Łada in Neuss/Nötzold 2013, p. 31), have proven, with their pro-European courage and constructive engagement, that any lack can be compensated.

Provided there is a common will, of course. Kaczyński (in Karolewski et al. 2014, pp. 27–42) outlines other challenging pretexts that Poland had to face when taking over the EU Presidency stern, not least the systemic constrain itself, for the Lisbon Treaty 'has made the rotating Council Presidencies politically irrelevant' (*ibid.*, p. 27). Further limitations concerned EU-level (the Euro crisis, Schengen debates) and domestic-level (parliamentary elections in Poland, limitations of national public administration as regarded policymaking competencies at EU level) challenges and constraints. It is against this backdrop that the Polish EU Council Presidency had to be considered, as it was duly, precisely and comprehensively accomplished by the Karolewski et al. (2014) team and less ambitiously (i.e. more loosely and moderately) assessed in the Neuss/Nötzold (2013) edited volume.

For Karolewski et al.'s (2014) narrative, a three-tier approach was adopted. It consisted of functional, behavioural and contingency analysis (cf. Mehlhausen and Karolewski in Karolewski et al. 2014, pp. 9–19). The functional analysis revolves around the assessment of the Polish performance along the six main functions of EU Presidencies: management, agenda-setting, internal mediation, inter-institutional agency, external representation, and media spinning. These, in turn, were evaluated along the tensional bivariate behaviour template of any country at the EU's Presidency stern – the formal neutrality ('honest broker' behaviour) and informal advocacy of national preferences ('self-centred president' behaviour line). Finally, to exclude salient biases and assess the performance of Poland not only in purely formal institutional and policy terms, but also in terms of (largely informal) practices that have been implicit to the Presidency's politics, the analysis features, in its contingency dimension, intervening variables. Essentially, these are seen as 'circumstances beyond the Presidency's control' (Mehlhausen and Karolewski in Karolewski et al. 2014, p. 17) and do basically represent endogenous (domestic environment, reputation, timely preparations, availability of special resources) and exogenous factors (subject sensitivity, heterogeneity of preferences among multiple actors and stakeholders, external shocks and 'usurpative initiatives', the latter ones being events or developments that overwhelmingly absorb the Presidency's attention, as for instance, was the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 for the French Presidency). Such a well-balanced and well-informed analytical approach allows for consistent and coherent examination of virtually all policy fields that were central for the embedded case study of the Polish EU Council Presidency in Karolewski et al.'s (2014) volume.

Kozłowska's take in the Neuss/Nötzold (2013) volume casts a succinct look on the broad key themes pursued by Poland during its EU Presidency term – a mission to sustain and develop a 'common', 'sustainable', 'secure' and 'open' Europe (*ibid.*, pp.47-58). Such an agenda implies much more beyond the Eastern Partnership initiative. Given the latter's status as a bold achievement (all the critique on the ENP notwithstanding), both books open their empirical debates on the Polish EU Council Presidency precisely with this policy domain (cf. Hahn-Fuhr and Lang in Karolewski et al. 2014, pp. 67–83; Lang in Neuss/Nötzold 2013, pp. 59–78). Perhaps for the partly identical authorship, the different analytical approaches pursued by the two books completely converge in their final evaluation of the Eastern Partnership, a pivotal policy area for Poland. In their respective chapters, both books posit that Poland achieved modest results, although kept a rather high profile and managed to dispel the skeptic myths it faced when starting its work – 'a good one' as Lang in Neuss/Nötzold (2013, p.73) maintains. Albeit less successful in exercising the expected influence on the EU's Eastern partners themselves, 'Poland will still remain the symbolic leader of the Eastern Partnership even after the Presidency', goes the contention

further (*ibid.*, p.75).

Other areas of Polish engagement during the EU Council Presidency are less straightforward. It was hard for Warsaw to find its role (choosing between 'honest brokerage' and 'self-centered presidency') within the Union's climate and energy policies, wherefore it rather took the situational approach – depending on the issues and opportunities at stake (cf. Wyciszkievicz in Karolewski et al. 2014, pp. 85–98). Polish agency in foreign, security and defence matters (embraced by the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, CFSP) is likely to be seen as that of an 'honest supporter' for it has provided a conceptual input and operational backup for the High Representative and the newly established European External Action Service (EEAS), as reveals Sus (in Karolewski et al. 2014, pp. 99–115).

Poland has also tried to be supportive in Single Market affairs, especially with regard to post-crisis economic policy. Although not a member of the Euro zone (which obviously shrank the scope of action for Warsaw), Poland found its way and acted as a mediator between the members and non-members of the Euro area, which helped the country to gain a wider recognition. Not least importantly from Germany in return for the Polish support (translated into EU policy) in Euro stabilizing politics and also broader – by involving in what's known as 'economic governance's six-pack workout' (cf. Tokarski in Karolewski et al. 2014, pp. 117–130). Slimmer than that, the Polish Presidency effort has brought much more moderate results in the EU's regional and cohesion policies (cf. Garsztecki in Neuss/Nötzold 2013, pp. 101–122) as well as in the Union's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ), where the long-disputed extension of the Schengen Area to Romania and Bulgaria has not been set off table even until now (cf. Niedobitek in Neuss/Nötzold 2013, pp. 79–99). In general though, when contemplating on what the future holds for both the EU and Poland itself, one would assume rather a positive development. Not without the prudent presidency's action, Poland's effort, invested in the complicated process of MAFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) negotiation, may soon turn out seminal for Warsaw, the main beneficiary of the EU's Structural and Cohesion Funds (cf. Kölling in Karolewski et al. 2014, pp. 147–161). The successful completion of accession negotiations with Croatia has also given Polish (rather pushy) advocacy for further EU enlargement (at least to Ukraine and Moldova) a modest credibility, if not the necessary salience (cf. Węc in Karolewski et al. 2014, pp. 131–146).

To complement the picture of Poland's role in the European Union beyond the moment of the EU Council Presidency, part three of the Neuss/Nötzold (2013) volume offers an insight into the key developments in Polish-German bilateral and European politics (pp. 145–162), German perception of Poland and its impact on the Polish performance during the EU Council Presidency (pp. 163–182), and finally an insight into the 'German factor' in Poland's anticipated Euro zone membership (pp. 183–205).

Oddly enough, the Neuss/Nötzold (2013) edited volume is cropped off the 'conclusion' section to logically wrap up the book narrative. Contextually, it nonetheless allows one to draw some conclusions. The book's authorship, nearly in unison, deems Poland having 'cut quite a dash' (i.e. *'bemerkenswert gute Figur gemacht'*, as the wording goes, p. 159). Meanwhile, the Karolewski et al.'s (2014) edited volume is more critical in its evaluations and deems the Polish mission being 'satisfactory accomplished' (p. 163).

Similar and at the same time distinct as they are, both titles have their strengths and weaknesses. The weakness of the Karolewski et al.'s (2014) book is mainly that it *could* have covered more policy fields, such as migration and culture, health, equality and minorities, to turn this theoretically well-informed and impressively *comprehensive* empirical research into a *complete* one. The weakness of the Neuss/Nötzold (2013) volume is mainly that it *should* have developed a common analytical grid to make the *promising* take on the topical issue in contemporary EU affairs a *prominent* – theoretically informed and empirically well-grounded – source of knowledge. Both titles' strengths draw on their well alone-standing reads' virtue, just as their perfect complementarity and combinability. They simply go well together. Anyone looking for how to grasp the Polish emerging role on the EU's evolving political landscape should necessarily take a *tour de lecture/Lektüre* of these insightful collective book publications.

[1] Simone Weske. (2006). *Deutschland und Frankreich – Motor einer Europäischen Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik?* Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.



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