



The Czech Presidency in the Council of the European Union – the view from Poland

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Introduction

The Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU has, since the very beginning, attracted negative comments, especially in the “old” member states. A “new” rather small member state, which has not yet ratified the Lisbon Treaty, was under close scrutiny of the more experienced and influential partners in the Community. The deepening financial crisis and the volatile situation on the European stage as well as the new American administration getting into power, all that suggested that the time of the Czech Presidency would be full of new challenges. That resulted in unequivocal signals coming from some European capitals, expressing concern that Prague might not be able to face up to the challenge. Some had predicted a failure of the Presidency even before it started. At the very beginning of the Presidency, it appeared that, apart from the already adopted priorities, some other important and unforeseen events moved to the top of the agenda. The Russian-Ukrainian dispute and the conflict in the Gaza Strip required immediate response from the Czech Republic as the representative of the whole European Union. At the same time, in the Czech Republic itself, efficient EU activity was hindered not only by the Euro sceptical president Vaclav Klaus. The internal government crisis which led to the collapse of Mirek Topolanek’s cabinet in the middle of the Czech Presidency, effectively blocked Prague’s functioning as the EU external representative and as the party initiating internal EU agreements.

While evaluating the achievements of the Czech Presidency, it is therefore necessary to take into account a number of factors. Both the preparation of the Czechs to the Presidency, the adopted priorities and their implementation as well as the unexpected challenges and the way they have been dealt with, all that needs to be considered. A question should also be asked, how the activities of the Czech Republic and their assessment in Europe have been affected by the fact that it is a small country and that it has been their first Presidency of the EU.

Have the “old” member states been ready to relinquish their “power” to the Czechs? Or perhaps their example has led to generalization of the assessment and creation of a general image of all states that acceded to the European Union in 2004 and 2007?

Answering these questions is necessary to draw conclusions useful for the Polish preparations for the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2011. While formulating the recommendations for the Polish administration, it is therefore necessary to look closely into the preparation of the Czech Republic to the Presidency, into the implementation of their priorities as well as the organization and promotion of their activities.

This paper has been prepared on the basis of analysing the existing sources, including documents and press articles as well as interviews with Polish government administration officials, representatives of the third sector, experts and journalists (total of 18 interviews, including: 4 interviews with experts, 12 with public administration officials). The statements and assessments presented below arise from the conclusions drawn from the interviews and the analysis of the written material. Therefore they are not only the opinions of the Institute of Public Affairs but they also represent the position of a group of Polish experts. Whenever our interlocutors significantly differed in their views, those differences have been highlighted in the text. At this point, we wish to express sincere thanks to all those people who devoted their time to talk to us and thus contributed to the value of this report. We also wish to thank the Heinrich Böll Foundation, with which we cooperated on this project.

The adopted priority tasks and their implementation

The fundamental right and obligation of a presidency is to set the priorities for the European Union activity during their 6 months lead. The work plan is usually developed taking various factors into consideration. It should be consistent with the EU long term objectives and with its current agenda as well as with expectations of other member states. It is agreed by the so called Presidency Trio (in the case of the Czech Republic – with France and Sweden), but it also contains objectives that are particularly close to the heart of the presiding country. The programme must be possible to implement during the 6 months as each presidency is assessed particularly from the point of view of fulfilling the commitments that it has imposed upon itself. Therefore the presidency is not completely free in shaping the programme of its work, yet, it can place the emphasis at its own discretion.

The Czechs have described their priorities as the three „Es”: economy, energy and Europe in the world. Under “economy” they meant fighting against the consequences of the financial markets crisis, under “energy” they included increasing the energy security of Europe and the international negotiations concerning climate protection after 2012, whereas in the area of external relations – the focus has been mainly on the Eastern Partnership, important also for Poland¹.

Cooperation within the Presidency Trio

In the declaration attached to the Lisbon Treaty, a new mechanism of presidency has been proposed, the so called group presidency of three member states over the period of 18 months, where every member state would hold the

¹ Work programme of the Czech presidency. „Europe without Barriers”, <http://www.eu2009.cz/en/czech-presidency/programme-and-priorities/programme-and-priorities-479/>, pp. v-viii.

Presidency of the EU for subsequent six months. The states are not only supposed to agree joint eighteen-month work programme but also to support each other. The previous Trio: Germany, Portugal and Slovenia applied this model. France, Czech Republic and Sweden have also presented a joint programme², therefore we have thought it appropriate to evaluate the cooperation of the Czech Presidency within the Trio. It is not, however, an easy task, as the current Trio is only the second such team and proper cooperation mechanisms have not been developed yet. Nevertheless, it seems that the cooperation has been difficult. Among the three cooperating states, France has had the strongest position, and that was why Paris tried to have their objectives reflected in the eighteen-month programme. In addition, France was rather reluctant to hand over the Presidency after 6 months to a small and quite new member state such as the Czech Republic. President Nicolas Sarkozy belittled the Czechs even before their Presidency started as well as while it was already in progress. He questioned the significance of the official EU mission to the Middle East, making his own mediation attempts. Moreover, the interests of France and the Czech Republic differed in many aspects, such as for instance, agricultural issues. Some experts have, therefore, concluded that in fact there was no cooperation between France and the Czech Republic: “The French didn’t give a damn about the Czechs and the Swedes were busy planning their own presidency. And the Czechs did not really ask for assistance”. However, other opinions have appeared that at the administrative level, in matters of a more technical character, not visible for the media, the Czechs could count on the real support and help from the Swedes.

² *Program prac prezydencji: francuskiej, czeskiej i szwedzkiej*, Office of the Committee for European Integration, „Monitor Europejski“ 2008, no. 51, pp. 7–60.

Eastern Partnership

In the area of external relations (Europe in the world), the most important objective of the Czech Presidency has been the action to implement the Eastern Partnership³. This initiative was proposed by Poland and Sweden in May 2008, as a tool for deepening the relations with the EU eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Czechs have supported the Eastern Partnership since the very beginning, treating it as the crowning achievement of their own efforts to develop the cooperation with the EU eastern neighbours, especially during their presidency of the Vysehrad Group⁴. Prague had also been involved in developing the more detailed programme for the Partnership, submitted to the European Commission in October 2008⁵. That project was expected to be the main achievement of the Czech Presidency – its identification mark. In December 2008, the European Commission published a communication containing specific proposals for the Partnership⁶. The role of the Czechs was to ensure its final acceptance, which actually took place during the March meeting of the European Council, when the funding for the project was agreed in the amount of 600 million Euro by the end of 2013. On the 7 May 2009, in Prague, a summit launching the Partnership was held, with the participation of the beneficiary states. However, apart from Angela Merkel, no other leaders of the biggest EU member states attended the summit, which some observers interpreted as a defeat both of the Czechs and of the very idea of the Eastern Partnership. The lower than expected significance of the summit was also caused by the fact that two days later, Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek was to resign from office.

³ *Program prezydencji...*, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴ D. Kral, V. Bartovic, V. Rihackova, *The 2009 Czech EU Presidency: contested leadership in the time of crisis*, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, Stockholm 2009, s. 51.

⁵ B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie – raport otwarcia*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warsaw April 2009, pp. 20–23.

⁶ *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council „Eastern Partnership”*, COM(2008) 823, 3 December 2008.

The activity of the Czech Presidency related to the Eastern Partnership may be assessed positively. Polish experts consider the very fact of adopting such a priority a right decision, a success, especially from the Polish point of view, if one takes into account such external factors as the financial crisis, unstable situation in some of the countries to which the programme is addressed (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus) and reluctance on the part of some member states to undertake action contrary to Russia's will.

The organisation of the summit in Prague devoted to that initiative was not just a symbolic moment. The initiative was actually launched at the summit, for which the Czechs should take the credit, especially as their internal situation at that time was not conducive to undertaking any major action. The declaration signed at the summit, even though not taking into account all the proposals of the six states covered by the programme, is, nevertheless, a document which, in conjunction with the document published by the European Commission, makes it possible to start the activities leading to the implementation of the Eastern Partnership. That must be considered a Czech success.

The biggest challenges faced by any new initiative include acquisition of funds to finance its implementation. In total, for the years 2010–2013, 600 million Euro has been allocated, although in fact, the new funding amounts only to 350 million, the rest being the so called re-programmed resources, shifted from the regional cooperation funding under the Neighbourhood Policy⁷. It is not the sum of money that could make a real difference in the beneficiary states or satisfy the ambitions of the states that have initiated the project, including Poland, but if we take account of the current financial crisis and the rather limited influence of the Czech government, we must admit that it is a step in the right direction.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 16.

Comparing the Czech Republic and France in the context of the two projects promoted by those countries, often considered jointly: the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean, one might reach a conclusion that Prague promoted its initiative rather weakly and did not seek support for it as actively as Paris did for their project. But here again we must remember both, about the internal crisis in the Czech Republic and about the much more limited influence of that country on the European stage⁸. In addition, the self-limitation of the Czechs is often mentioned in this context, especially in pushing forward those elements of the Partnership which raised some controversy, in order to avoid a situation where particular Czech interests are excessively emphasised⁹.

To summarise, in the current geopolitical and internal situation, the Czech Republic could not have done more for the Eastern Partnership. Now is the time, when some concrete action needs to be taken, whose results it will only be possible to judge in a longer perspective. However, in Poland, the very launch of the programme is often considered a success of the Czech Presidency, especially from the perspective of Poland and, perhaps even, the whole Central and Eastern Europe. The Czechs have done what had to be done and what, in the current situation could be done.

Economy and the financial crisis

As a result of the financial crisis, the Czech priorities for the area of economy have changed. Originally, the Czechs planned to focus on the further development of the common market, removing the still existing barriers or the development of the Lisbon Agenda. The growing financial crisis, and resulting

⁸ An important fact in this case, although not mentioned by Polish experts, is the lack of direct borders between the Czech Republic and the states included in the programme. That is the reason why the Czechs naturally have a different approach to the programme than France to its own initiative, Union for the Mediterranean.

⁹ See B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie – raport otwarcia*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warsaw April 2009, p. 22.

economic slowdown, together with the sceptical attitude of some EU capitals towards such a liberal programme, made the Czech Presidency focus on fighting to sustain the main principles of the single market, that is to block the protectionist tendencies of some “old” member states. The Czechs have clearly opposed protectionism as a way of fighting the crisis. The competitiveness of the European economy had to be strengthened in accordance with the internal market rules, especially those concerning state aid. That placed the Czech Republic in opposition against other states, especially France. Prime Minister Topolanek strongly criticised president Sarkozy for his announcement to take steps, for instance, to transfer the factories owned by the French automotive companies from the Czech Republic to France. Both the European Commission and the “new” Member States, including Poland, have taken a firm stance against protectionism.

Polish experts have appreciated the Czech firmness in opposing the disturbance of common market operation principles: “Here, the Czech Republic has been very firm. *Chapeau bas* – they have reacted in an absolutely uncompromising way”. The results of an extraordinary informal meeting of the EU state and government leaders, devoted to the crisis, held on the 1 March 2009, have also been seen as positive. Some have even considered them the greatest success of the Presidency. For others, however, it has had only a symbolic character. The meeting, in a way, closed the discussion on protectionism and gave a clear signal that it would not be accepted in the EU. The paradox of the whole situation was evident, “new member states, such as the Czech Republic, care much more for the fundamental principles of the European Union: solidarity, the real common market, than some “old” member states do” .

In Poland, the dealing with specific issues by the Czech Presidency in the ECOFIN Council and its working groups, such as adopting legislation changes

or conclusions of the Council, has also received positive assessment. During the first phase of the Presidency, the Czechs were recognised as effective and consistent. What may have influenced the positive assessment, was the fact that the interests of Poland and the Czech Republic in that respect were similar at that time – Polish Prime Minister was no less firm in this matter than his Czech equivalent, especially when opposing the idea to issue common Euro Zone bonds.

An important decision taken during the March meeting of the European Council (19–20 March), was to increase the financial assistance to the member states from Central and Eastern Europe who remain outside the Euro Zone, from 25 to 50 billion Euro under the so called “support facility”¹⁰. That decision should be treated as a success of the “new” member states and the Czech Presidency, which, while preserving the intermediary role of the global financial institutions, secured a possibility to obtain support from the “old” members of the Community. Poland was satisfied with the action of the Czech Republic in this matter.

However, a number of our interlocutors have questioned the significance of the Czech involvement in tackling the crisis. Opinions have appeared that the Czech Presidency was ignored when real decisions were made. That happened, for instance, when the agreement was reached on the Community part of the European Economic Recovery Plan, adopted at the meeting of the European Council on 19-20 March, mentioned above, when the most important arrangements were agreed between the biggest states and the Commission: “The Czechs hadn’t done anything, the Commission was much more active”. The Presidency took a bold decision to have the GAERC (General Affairs and External Relations Council), and in consequence – the European Council, work on the Plan, even though it was not at all certain that a consensus would be

¹⁰ See the European Council 19–20 March 2009, Presidency Conclusions, 7880/1/09, REV1, CONCL 1, Brussels 29 April 2009.

reached. That move was considered as playing *va banque*. In spite of that, it was the Commission that played the key role in the negotiations.

Even though some experts have treated the adoption of the Plan as one of the greatest Czech achievements, the real fight against crisis, in view of many experts, was taking place not only outside the Presidency but also outside EU institutions. At the Community level, there are no instruments to respond to a crisis situation and the Presidency cannot do anything about it. Therefore the anti-protectionist rhetoric was important, but practical action was even more so, and on that, the Presidency had very little or in fact no influence at all. As far as the negotiations of the EU position for the G-20 meeting is concerned, the general assessment has been that the Czechs had done well in chairing the debate, yet the differences of opinions among the members states were too big for the Presidency to be able to play any significant role. Thus, the Polish reception of the Czech activities in the economic sphere has varied.

Energy and the environment

Energy and climate change have been among the priorities of the Czech Presidency. In the area of energy, after the French Presidency had focused on the climate and energy package, the Czechs decided to put more emphasis on energy security, attaching the key importance to the following issues: diversification of the energy sources and transit routes, reducing the dependence on Russia and taking further action on the funding for the Nabucco¹¹ project, which, to a certain extent, was a reaction to the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict earlier in the year. An essential element of the programme were also the negotiations concerning the liberalization of the energy market, the so called third energy package. During the March summit of the European Council, an agreement was reached on the list of energy projects to be implemented under

¹¹ *Program prezydencji...*, op. cit., pp. 14–17.

the Community part of the anti-crisis plan, for which almost 80% of the 5 billion Euro worth plan was allocated¹². It has been considered a success of the Czech Presidency that the Nabucco Pipeline was eventually included on the list, something that Germany had earlier opposed.

A number of Polish experts think that the Czechs should be praised for the agreement reached on financing infrastructure energy projects. It is considered a success that additional funding was secured and that the Nabucco Pipeline was included on the list. From the Polish point of view, “the Czechs have done a good job”, and “the European Union has shown that it can have common energy interests”. However, some experts have been sceptical. Funds allocated for the Nabucco project are not big and, what is important, during the special summit at the beginning of May in Prague, devoted to the Southern Corridor, the participants failed to sign contracts for gas supply to the Nabucco Pipeline. It has been noted that even though the result of the meeting met the Czech expectations, it was rather the Commission who facilitated the discussion and not the Presidency.

Unlike in the energy issues, the activities of the Czech Republic in the area of climate policy turned out to be a complete failure. The Presidency had planned, first of all, to develop the position of the EU for the negotiations during the Copenhagen Conference in December 2009, and the spring European Council was supposed to discuss the mechanism of financing the fight against climate change. Because of the participation of the Green Party in the ruling coalition, the environmental policy issues played an important role in the Presidency agenda¹³. The Presidency Work Plan has been assessed as ambitious but the same could not be said about its actual achievements.

¹² See Council of the EU, *Presidency compromise proposal for financing of the infrastructure projects put forward by the Commission as part of the EERP*, 7848/1/09 REV 1, 20 March 2009.

¹³ D. Kral, V. Bartovic, V. Rihackova, op. cit., pp. 49–50.

In view of the Polish experts, the Czechs, because of the difficulties in cooperation within the coalition, left the initiative totally to the other member states¹⁴. They were completely invisible in the decision making process. All the problems during the negotiations were solved without the participation of the Presidency, by the interested states. The Czechs often could not “keep up with the negotiations”, where agreement was reached without their participation, by the most interested member states. The achieved consensus was only “notified” to the Presidency. The Czechs often did not even show interest in the negotiations, handing over the initiative to the British experts who led on many issues on behalf of the Presidency. One of our interlocutors has summed it up by saying that the Czechs had even given up representing their own interests¹⁵. They not only failed to facilitate the discussion, which is a natural role of a Presidency, but they did not even take part in the negotiations as a member state. After the collapse of the government, the problem became even more acute. The Czech attitude was described as “total silence, total indifference”.

Analysing the outcome of the implementation of the adopted priorities, one should emphasise a number of factors that influenced the effectiveness of the Czech action. Firstly, a small country, overwhelmed by a political crisis, with a weak government and the weak position on the European stage, has, by definition, much less room for manoeuvre and will not attempt any spectacular action. Secondly, because of the external situation, a lot of energy had to be devoted to other things than the Czechs had originally planned. In addition, the attitude towards the Czech Presidency was negative from the very beginning, especially in the West, which made their work, especially at the political level,

¹⁴ The political groups forming the ruling coalition (including the Czech Green Party) did not agree on the issues of environmental protection, which made it difficult for the Czechs to present a uniform position on international scene and to promote their own interests.

¹⁵ As it has been mentioned, one of the reasons could be the lack of a single position among the Czechs themselves.

even more difficult. Only in this perspective can the effectiveness of the Czech Presidency be properly evaluated. And yet, trying to make a general assessment of the implementation of the Czech Presidency work programme, it is still difficult to formulate an unequivocal opinion.

The first half of the Czech Presidency, until the collapse of the Czech government, taking into account all the factors mentioned above, may be assessed rather positively, although without any spectacular success and not in all areas of EU policies. It has come as a certain surprise, as the western press had been predicting that the Presidency would be close to a disaster. Whereas the priority objectives such as the Eastern Partnership or financing of energy projects were successfully completed. The situation differed in a number of detailed issues, not treated as priorities. There, the work plan has been assessed as vague and not very ambitious. Its implementation has also been criticized, primarily because it lacked political support and commitment.

The experts more sceptical about the role of the Czechs, have concluded that, in fact, the events were following their own course. Even though the Presidency, on the whole, worked satisfactorily, during some important developments, the lead was taken naturally by the biggest member states: “The priority objectives were implemented but a question remains, to what extent the credit for that should be taken by the Presidency and to what extent by EU governments and institutions. I would not say that the Czech Presidency was a driving force, a motor behind the action, although they did play a part in achieving the priority objectives [...] they were trying to lead, but the steering wheel was slipping away from their hands”.

Internal situation – a government crisis in the middle of the Presidency

The change of the Czech government in the middle of the Presidency had a definitely negative influence on its performance. “The collapse of the

government had changed everything” – our experts have agreed. They have described that fact as a “disaster” and “the greatest failure of the Presidency”. The Czech politicians, who had not been able to reach a consensus of the main political forces around the Presidency, have been assessed very negatively. The period of the Presidency has been divided into two parts: before and after the collapse of the Topolánek’s cabinet. Although the Czech government had not had a very strong position in the EU since the very beginning, in a situation when the country had only a provisional government, the Czech Republic no longer counted as the leader of the EU. Since a presidency is usually evaluated on the basis of its media image and not on the basis of its real achievements, a number of their accomplishments, especially those of the Czech officials, have been wasted by the politicians. Even if they were successful in certain areas, showed efficient organisation and professional expertise, all that was overshadowed by the temporariness and uncertainty of their internal political scene. The change of the government that took place at that time, affected the way in which the Presidency was perceived and its leadership in matters that required political commitment. In that respect, the Presidency was virtually invisible, with no influence or power. For instance, the Irish declaration concerning the Lisbon Treaty, whose negotiation the Presidency should have facilitated, was agreed with the member states by Ireland itself. The Czechs focused on the technical running of the necessary business, not taking any serious initiatives. The opinions on whether the collapse of the government affected the expert dimension of the works, in the working groups, have been divided. Some Polish officials have said that the impact was practically unnoticeable, the matters followed their own course according to the natural EU dynamics, whereas others will say that the impact was great and definitely negative: discussions were stifled. The Czechs seemed to wait for the Presidency to end.

Since the very beginning, the scepticism of the president Vaclav Klaus affected the perception of the Presidency. Everyone (including the Czech government that tried, therefore, to marginalize the role of the president) realised that he would have a negative influence on the course of the Presidency. In the eyes of the observers, the first weeks confirmed those concerns. For instance, comparing of the European Union to the Soviet Union in his speech to the European Parliament gained a lot of publicity. Only after the collapse of the government¹⁶ could certain changes be noticed. The head of state became involved in the activities of the Presidency. Klaus was present at some meetings, attended the summits. Flying the EU flag over the Hradcany Castle became a symbol of a certain evolution. That, however, did not change the fact that the president was still perceived in a very negative way. In view of the lack of any alternative political leadership (a former head of the statistical office could not count as one) Klaus did fill a certain gap.

The failure to ratify the Lisbon Treaty has not had any influence on the way the Czech Presidency has been perceived in Poland. At the beginning of the year 2009, that subject was still relevant and suggested that it could cause some additional problems to the Czechs. However, with the growing crisis and other international problems, Lisbon was moved to the background and did not have any impact on the course or the perception of the Presidency.

Expected and unexpected challenges in external relations

One of the roles of the Presidency is to represent the Union in external relations. However, the common foreign policy still remains an area in which the competencies of the Presidency of the Union, the European Commission and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy are

¹⁶ The president himself contributed to the collapse of the government by refusing to enable Topolánek to stay in the office until the end of the Czech presidency.

limited. It is required of the Presidency to speak on behalf of the whole Community, even though the real foreign policy of the EU does not exist; it is just a product of foreign policies of all member states. That can be changed only by the Lisbon Treaty, which specifies certain arrangements concerning the international representation of the EU. What it is going to look like in practice will only be seen after a few years of the operation of the Treaty. Currently, every state presiding over the European Union must, to some extent, make its own decision as to how much of a voice of the entire Union it wishes to be. The very first days of the Czech Presidency showed how important that role is. Instead of a peaceful administering of EU affairs, the Czechs had to face the invasion of Israel in the Gaza Strip, and deal with the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict. The Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra called it afterwards “a trial by fire”¹⁷.

Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The issue of EU-Israeli relations had been included in the agenda of the Czech Presidency but in a completely different scope than the one in which it now had to be tackled. There had been plans to organize the first ever summit EU-Israel. Meanwhile, the Presidency found itself in the role of a mediator in an Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The start was not good – the spokesman of the Foreign Affairs Minister called the Israeli invasion of Gaza: “a justified act of self-defence”, which caused an outbreak of criticism from a number of member states. Eventually, the spokesman apologised and handed in his resignation¹⁸, and minister Karel Schwarzenberg called his words a mistake. On the 5 January 2009, Swarzenberg headed an EU special mediation mission to the Middle East,

¹⁷ *Alexandr Vondra: oblicze czeskiej prezydencji*, interview published on the European Parliament website, 12 February 2009, URL:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/008-48733-040-02-07-901-20090206STO48712-2009-09-02-2009/default_pl.htm (28.03.2009).

¹⁸ The resignation was not accepted.

but its achievements were poor – only a few hours ceasefire. At the same time, Nicolas Sarkozy went to the Middle East, questioning the importance of the official EU mission. “It is difficult for Sarkozy to face the fact that the *show* must end one day”, remarked the Czech Deputy Prime Minister Vondra¹⁹. However, it was the French president who announced, in Egypt, a plan for a lasting armistice. It was not, by the way, accepted by Israel. That showed that not only the Czech Republic, but also other, perceived as more important, member states, and therefore the whole European Union, have a very limited influence on solving the Middle East conflict.

The views of Polish experts on the Czech achievements in this respect have varied. More sceptical experts have emphasized the lack of proper background, knowledge of the situation and the lack of experts. The majority of the interlocutors, however, have stated that even though the situation proved to be beyond the capabilities of the Czechs, they cannot be blamed for that. The possibilities of diplomacy of such small countries are objectively limited, especially in remote regions, therefore one cannot compare their effectiveness with the effectiveness of France or the United Kingdom. Comparing the conflict in Gaza with the war in Georgia, the experts wondered: “in the case of the Georgian conflict, it was clear that Russia would talk to France, but what would happen if the conflict broke out earlier, during the Slovene Presidency? Which of the Slovene politicians would go to Russia to mediate? That is why in my opinion, until the collapse of the government the Czechs were doing well”.

Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict

Another problem of the first weeks of the Czech Presidency was the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict, which led to the break in the supply of the Russian natural gas to Europe. Negotiations between Gazprom and Naftogaz

¹⁹ L. Palata, *Siedzimy w tym po uszy, w gazie i w Gazie*, „Gazeta Wyborcza” of 12 January 2009.

had not led to the conclusion of a new contract and on 1 January 2009 natural gas stopped flowing. At first, the Czechs did not take the conflict very seriously, treating it as a bilateral trade issue. However, when it became clear that it was an issue concerning the whole EU and the break in gas supply was felt by several Central European countries, the Presidency started to act much more firmly than in the case of the Middle East, calling, e.g. an informal meeting of the Energy Council. The Czechs clearly avoided taking sides, trying to remain neutral, which made it possible to influence both Kiev and Moscow, and was consistent with the position of the European Commission. A special meeting of the GAERC was called, negotiations were held with representatives of both companies and both states. The main task of the Presidency was to persuade the Russians and the Ukrainians to accept the EU mission monitoring the flow of gas. The negotiations were long and difficult. They covered the issue of gas prices, transit charges, technical and political issues. Prime Minister Topolanek was very much involved in the mediation and his role was positively assessed by European press.

Polish experts have assessed the general activities of the Czechs during the gas conflict either positively or neutrally, emphasising that “they did what they could”, but without any great success as, for some time still, the gas did not start to flow to Europe. They have decided that the beginning, when the conflict was treated as an internal problem between Russia and Ukraine, was unfortunate, but with time, the Presidency, and especially Prime Minister Topolanek, were doing better and better. The more critical ones have admitted that the Presidency did what they could, but only the biggest member states could realistically influence the behaviour of Russia: “the Presidency can do something when they have a partner on the other side, and Russia was not a partner, Russia generally is not a partner in such situations”. In addition, Ukraine behaved “extremely irresponsibly, hoping that the EU had no choice but to support Ukraine even if Kiev was acting stupid”. That was why the EU had

been ignored by both sides of the conflict for quite a long time. It should however, be appreciated that the Czechs managed to involve the whole Union in the dispute: “Thanks to them, the whole EU realized that it was a political issue. The Czechs ran the negotiations well”. Thanks to the Presidency, it was possible to “inject” a little Central European perspective on Russia, which could later play a role in acquiring EU funding for the Nabucco Pipeline, in order to ensure sources of natural gas supply alternative to the Russian ones.

Some experts have criticised the Czechs for the lack of political and expert preparation to respond to both international crises – the gas crisis and the Middle East one. The Presidency let itself be taken by surprise and their initial responses were ill-judged. They lacked an analytical base and a coordination system. However, most of the experts have been firm in justifying those shortcomings: “Had any other country been prepared for the gas crisis or the Israeli invasion in the Gaza Strip? No, it had not. Maybe Israel had. The fact that the Czechs did not have a magic wand and were not able to halt the Israeli military intervention, or in two days convince Russia and Ukraine to make up, this is not their fault. Such miracles do not happen. They did what they were politically able to do. The Czech Republic has not been, is not and will not be involved in the Middle East conflict. If anything happens there, actors such as France, the UK, the US or Germany must intervene”.

Relations with the USA

The Czech Presidency coincided with the time when the power in the United States was taken over by the new administration. Developing good relations with Washington, and first of all, presenting itself as an important

partner, with both real expectations from and proposals for the Obama administration, became one of the tasks for Prague²⁰.

For the meeting of the European leaders with Obama, no specific agenda had been set that could end with any significant decisions. Therefore the very fact that the Czechs were able to organise the visit of the American president in Prague should be treated as success. The summit meeting itself did not bring any breakthrough, but it had been planned rather as an ice-breaking event. And so it was. President Obama announced the priorities of his administration, called for joint fight against climate change and against proliferation of nuclear weapons, appealed to the Europeans for accepting the Guantanamo detainees and for greater involvement in Afghanistan. He also supported the accession of Turkey into the EU.

Both Czech objectives – the visit of Obama in the Czech Republic and avoiding any major gaffes, have been achieved. Even though the American president did not dine with any of the Czech leaders, which some observers treated as a clear slap in the face for the Czechs, the first acquaintance had been made.

Small and new – a double challenge

As a country at the helm of the European Union for the first time, the Czech Republic has been very severely assessed. Even though the first of the group of states which joined the EU in 2004, to hold the Presidency, was Slovenia, the question how the “new” member states would cope with this role,

²⁰ Some controversies appeared in the bilateral Czech-American relations. Obama announced the verification of the plans to construct the anti-missile shield, and the location of the radar in the territory of the Czech Republic. Prague, on the other hand, announced that they were not going to accept Guantanamo detainees, and Prime Minister Topolanek called the American plan of fighting against the crisis “the road to hell”. See D. Kral, V. Bartovic, V. Rihackova, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–62.

was still asked. The Czech performance may therefore influence the general reputation of the whole group in the eyes of the “old” member states.

Presidency of the Council of the European Union, both by a state that does it for the first time and by players experienced on the European scene, requires thorough preparation. The preparation should primarily concern the subject matter: the areas treated as priorities but also such areas where no major initiatives are planned but which might unexpectedly become important in international politics. Organisational preparation is also necessary. Last but not least, the preparations should also include the area of internal politics. Concluding political disputes or placing the European issues in the foreground during the six months in question, so that nothing disturbed the Presidency activities, those are equally important tasks.

The state holding the Presidency may adopt two strategies. On the one hand, it can try to play the role of the European Union leader, to give the tone to its activity. This type of Presidency is usually chosen by bigger, economically stronger states, such as France in 2008. The other way of presiding the EU is the so called *low profile presidency* – the presiding state focuses on efficient administration of the Union and, if needed, undertakes mediation in the decision making process. It is easier for smaller countries to adopt such a role, since they can mediate between the bigger players because they are not so much geared towards promoting their own interests.

A small country and political clout

The Czechs, as a small country, chose the second type of Presidency – they tried to be administrators and mediators²¹. Their role was difficult because

²¹ Originally, the Czechs had had more ambitious plans, assuming greater activity, the proposed number of priorities had also been larger. However, the economic crisis and the internal instability verified those assumptions.

they did not have enough political clout to be a partner for the biggest member states. Although small states often play the role of an independent and objective mediator, the Czechs did not have the confidence of other states as other more experienced states, such as the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries, enjoyed. Moreover, in most of the discussions, over the last six months, they were perceived as a party in the dispute and not as an objective mediator. The assessment of the Polish experts as to how they fulfilled that role varies. Some think, that before the government crisis, the Czechs played that role well, efficiently leading to compromises. Their mediation efforts related to Eastern Partnership and its funding as well as to the energy projects accepted by the European Council, have been considered successful. In other areas, e.g. climate, the Czechs were practically invisible and the role of mediator between the most important players was played by the Commission. The inability to deal with such an important challenge as successful conclusion of the work on the working time directive was a failure in the role of a mediator. In spite of five years of efforts and the final agreement of the member states governments, the European Parliament had not agreed to accept the directive, which thwarted all the previous efforts²². The Czechs are also blamed for giving the floor too often to the British advisors (e.g. on climate issues) who had helped them prepare to the Presidency. That gave an impression that the Czechs were dominated by the British and did not represent their own interests²³. The Czechs were sometimes perceived as “more polite”, but definitely less effective than for example, the French, who brutally pushed forward their own interests during their Presidency.

²² At the same time, as a result of the lack of agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission, some other decisions were not adopted either, something over which the Presidency had no influence.

²³ It should be remembered, however, that as it has already been mentioned, there was no consensus within the Czech government as to the solutions in the area of environmental protection. That made it difficult for the Czechs to express their views on the subject and even more so, to present their own interests in this field.

Good preparation is fundamental?

Presidency of the Council of the EU is not a sudden or unexpected event. This makes it possible to get properly prepared – both from the point of view of the subject matter, logistics and internally – in domestic politics. The preparation to the Presidency may be analysed at three levels: organisation, subject matter and politics, which, in the case of the Czech Republic, has received different assessment.

From the point of view of organization, the Presidency has been prepared very professionally. Logistics worked very well. Here our interlocutors have agreed, that the Czechs had done their homework – the Czech administration had been well prepared for that difficult task. Also from the point of view of the subject matter at the expert level (until the collapse of the government, all that happened afterwards has been disregarded by our interlocutors) the preparation was at the very high level. The work in working groups in most areas was carried out efficiently and effectively, although not in all areas. Problems appeared with controversial subjects where it was necessary to secure political support. The less than excellent cooperation between the expert and the political level, and especially lack of political support for the efforts of lower level officials, resulted in slowing down the pace of work when it had to “move” from the working group level to Coreper (Committee of Permanent Representatives, fr. Comité des Représentants Permanents) and the Council. Whereas the priority subjects had been well prepared: Eastern Partnership and energy. The Czechs proved that they knew the subject matter and had the relevant expertise.

However, they let themselves be surprised by unexpected situations, such as the gas crisis and the Middle East conflict. In those cases, the lack of expert base (that is, preparation) was evident. It could be noticed that they did not have contingency plans, that they had not carried out the appropriate analyses and had not examined the situation so as to be able to take immediate action and provide

competent comments. A question remains whether anyone would be prepared for what happened and whether other countries would be better able to cope.

The failure to resolve the internal political problems before the Presidency, should definitely be regarded as lack of preparation. It is expected from a state presiding the Union that for the six months of their Presidency, the internal disputes will subside and efforts will be made to reach agreement between the main political forces in the country so as not to impede the fulfilment of the role of the EU leader. In the Czech Republic the crisis appeared in the middle of the Presidency, which hindered its further effective functioning. Polish experts have appreciated the achievements of the Czech officials, unequivocally criticising the political leaders. At the political level, the Czechs had not been prepared to the Presidency.

Administrator and organiser

Efficient Presidency also means a number of purely technical preparations and organisational activities. Contrary to some opinions that good organisation is already a standard, that everything works well, there are still a lot of areas where it is possible to fail to face up to the challenge. Especially as the state that is to preside the EU Council for the first time does not have the appropriate experience. If it is a small country, and it does not have a great number of administrative officials responsible for this sort of activity, the administrative challenge may be even greater.

The Czechs have faced up to the challenge. The meetings organized at different levels were well prepared, the necessary materials had been delivered in advance and the time and place of the meetings was kept as planned. Journalists had access to information and to the technical facilities. There have been no “slip-ups”. That clearly differed from the French Presidency which, in view of our interlocutors, not always provided proper organisational framework.

Here it was clearly visible that the Czechs tried hard while the French did not seem to care. The logistic side in the Czech Republic itself also functioned perfectly well. The specially prepared conference centre in Prague ensured efficient transfer between the debate venue and the airport and provided the necessary facilities to the participants.

However, even the best organised Presidency will not be appreciated if the internal troubles, as it was the case with the Czech Republic, overshadow other activities. That is why something that could be an important successful element, passed practically unnoticed.

Effectiveness of promotion

An effective Presidency may pass unnoticed or be assessed negatively, disproportionately to its successes, if appropriate steps are not taken to promote it. In this case, the presentation of the state and its activities in Brussels is particularly important as well as promotion of the Presidency itself among the citizens of the state performing that role.

The most famous promotional event of the Czech presidency was the installation by David Černý in the Council building. The project, which was supposed to be the work of artists from the twenty seven member states, turned out to be a mystification and the work of only one artist. By presenting all the EU member states in a very stereotypical way, Černý caused a scandal and the piece depicting Bulgaria had to be covered on Bulgarian demand. The assessment of the installation in Poland has varied: from admiration to total condemnation. The idea of the exhibition, and the exhibition itself had a chance to fulfil its role – to become a symbol of the Czech Presidency. The opinions of the Polish experts have been divided on whether the symbol was positive or negative. However, the collapse of the government destroyed the significance of all the efforts

to promote the country beyond its borders. In view of the turbulences of the internal politics they had no importance at all – they were not noticed or remembered. The already existing reputation of the Czechs as Euro sceptics, was an additional difficulty, which, as a result of government problems (interpreted as a sign that European integration was not one of the Czech priorities), was still reinforced.

The internal promotion of the Presidency – presenting it to its own citizens – was therefore also overshadowed by other events. Although “moving the Presidency out of the capital” – organising the meetings in the regions and not only in Prague – brought the EU closer to the inhabitants of smaller towns and villages, which was undoubtedly an advantage, it did not have, in view of the crisis, such a positive influence as it had been planned²⁴.

Social partners – the role of the third sector during the Czech Presidency

The Czech third sector is known for being well organised and thriving. There are a lot of organisations involved in creating and evaluating foreign and European policy. Non-governmental organizations play an important role in opinion making. During the Presidency, the non-governmental sector also had a chance to confirm that they were ready to cooperate with the government and that the administration treated is a partner. Representatives of non-governmental organizations took part in preparing the programme and initiatives promoting the Presidency and the Czech Republic in the EU, to the same extent as government officials.

²⁴ Also those numerous positive reports of the Czech media about the Presidency turned negative, after the fall of the government, which did not help create a positive image of the Presidency among the Czech citizens.

An example of such successful cooperation could be an international conference organised by the non-governmental sector, accompanying the Eastern Partnership summit – “Eastern Partnership: Towards civil society Forum”. It was co-organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, providing the venue, which gave it a much higher prestige. The effect of that event was publication of articles with the main conclusions and recommendations on the conference subject, formulated by representatives of the third sector. They thus constituted a public contribution to the contents of the Czech Presidency.

A similar, important initiative linking the activity of the government and that of the social partners was the conference: "Building Consensus about EU policies on Democracy Support", held in March 2009 in Prague. It was organised by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission in cooperation with the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) and Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights (DEMAS). Experts from the member states and EU institutions, together with representatives of the third sector, debated on the current significance of supporting democracy in European politics. The meeting was a part of the Czech support for the efforts of the Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM), which works on developing the so called “European Consensus on Democracy”. The document is expected to define a common position of the member states on the role of support for the democracy in external relations of the EU with third countries. The conference was, at the same time, a symbol of good cooperation between the government and the civil society organisations. The above initiative, together with other examples of joint initiatives of the state authorities and the third sector, indicate that their cooperation may be described as exemplary.

Czech Presidency and the Polish cause

While analysing the Czech Presidency from the Polish point of view, one should pay particular attention to two issues. Firstly, how the Czech Presidency influenced the reputation of the “new” member states as leaders of the European Union. The second question follows from the first one: how have Poles assessed the Czech Presidency and why do they hold such views. The assessment results not only from evaluating the achievements in the areas particularly important for Poland, but also from the fact that we are neighbours and from certain regional solidarity that both countries share.

Impact of the Czech Presidency on the reputation of the new member states

The assessment of the Czech Presidency may influence the reputation of the whole group of states which have recently joined the Community. In the eyes of the “old Europe” we are still often treated as an entity and the shortcomings of some states are associated with others. The democracy deficit, too little commitment to integration or political instability are the most frequent charges against the states accepted to the European Union after 2004. Expressing the views or proposing initiatives contradicting the opinions of the “old Europe” is perceived as the lack of gratitude of the new member states.

A separate issue is the readiness, especially of the most important countries that have belonged to the EU for a long time now, to hand over the power to their partners from Central and Eastern Europe. In this case, the difficulties may be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the long-standing EU members cannot come to terms with the fact that they now must share the power and take account of the opinion of an even greater group of states than before, and especially the states which, not so long ago, did not matter much on the European arena. They want, in a way, to emphasize their advantage, resulting from experience and economic development, which might look like

marginalization of Central and Eastern Europe and lack of confidence in the states of that region. On the other hand, the “old” capitals have learned to negotiate in a small group of 15 states and it is difficult for them to get used to the new rules. What makes things even more difficult are differences in the perception of some priorities by the group of the “old” and the “new” member states. Therefore, the behaviour of the former, does not necessarily mean any bad will towards the latter.

Even before the Czech Presidency started, there had been concerns that the Czechs would not face up to the challenge of leading the Union. One of the arguments was their lack of experience and political clout at the time when bold decisions were needed. The French press in particular attacked their successors in the role of EU leaders. But for example the British, in principle less involved in European matters, were not so unanimously negative in their judgement. So the assessment depended on the country.

The example of the Czech Republic translates into the perception of the whole region, unfortunately, rather negative. Even though the Czech administration showed that they were able to mobilize and act effectively and that the lack of experience may be compensated with good preparation, the Czech politicians did not make the grade. At first, the Czechs managed to effectively lead the Union and achieve certain solutions. Unfortunately, the government crisis overshadowed the successful beginning. What is remembered now are mainly the problems in internal politics and the Euro scepticism of president Klaus. The image of an uncertain, unpredictable country, which still has not ratified the Lisbon Treaty, is spread to other countries of the region. The position held by Klaus is very easy to link, into one model, with the attitude of president Lech Kaczyński, who is also delaying the ratification of the Treaty. That allows the “old” member states to make generalisations and stick a label of Euro sceptics on all the states of our region. The Czech Presidency will not

therefore make things easier for subsequent “new” member states, including Poland, that in the coming years will take over the Presidency of the European Union, as it consolidates the negative stereotypes in the West. It will be remembered as a presidency torn by internal problems, reluctant towards integration and overshadowed by the French Presidency. It will definitely not provide a good ground for building a positive image of the Polish preparation for the Presidency in 2011. Before Poland, the Presidency will be held by Hungary, whose economic and political situation is also very difficult. If their Presidency is not successful, it may affect negatively the expectations towards the Polish Presidency. In the view of some Polish experts, the problems that appear during the Presidency held by the “new” member states may in future be used as an argument for the abolition of the rotating presidency system.

Summary – the Polish perspective

In view of the above, Polish assessment of the Czech Presidency is based on two pillars. First, what is important is the implementation of those priorities that are vital from the Polish point of view – which are consistent with the areas in which our country wants to play a significant role or which are important for the development of Polish economy or foreign policy. That description fits two main areas of the Czech activity – Eastern Partnership and energy. Also the motto of the Czech Presidency: “Europe without barriers”, was interesting from the Polish point of view. At the same time, it proved to be difficult for the Czechs themselves because of the internal difficulties and the financial crisis. As it has already been mentioned, the realisation of those priorities may, in the opinion of Poles, be treated as a Czech success. In this context, Poland may be satisfied with the achievements of the last 6 months.

Second, the basis for the Polish assessment of the Czech Presidency is the already mentioned, lack of distinction in treating and perceiving the countries of

the Central and Eastern Europe in their European activity by the countries with a much longer record of Community membership. This leads to a certain solidarity among the “new” members. As neighbours with similar experience, who must struggle with similar economic and political problems, we understand each other better and we are not so strict in our judgments, seeing the broader context of the situation. We may even be a little lenient towards each other in view of the criticism of the western partners. Some of our interlocutors have openly admitted that in the context of unfair and aggressive tone of the French, they, as Poles, felt empathy towards the Czechs. Others have admitted that criticising the Czech achievements is not in our interest. “A negative perception of the Czech Presidency is our tragedy. We will be suffering the consequences of the anti-Czech campaign during our Presidency and even before that”. Similar problems may appear during Polish Presidency. The objectives that we will define may be the same as the Czech ones. Therefore we should not join the chorus of the critics. The “campaign” against the Czech Republic will also be an argument in favour of moving away from the rotating presidency. And this, in the opinion of the experts, is not in our interest.

Summing up the achievements of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, one should bear in mind a few facts. On the one hand, several external events had impact on the Presidency, the events that Prague could not have predicted and got prepared in advanced. The Czechs therefore had to adjust, to take decisions that were necessary and not such as they had earlier planned. On the other hand, the responsibility for the EU during the Presidency means that the state leading the Union will be prepared also for unexpected situations that require immediate competent response. The external factors were topped by the internal crisis. The collapse of the Czech government, as seen by the western observers, blighted the success achieved so far and limited their capability to act on the EU forum. However, unlike the

external situation, the political crisis was the result of the behaviour of the Czechs themselves.

The Czech Presidency was not a visible one. To a great extent, that was caused not so much by the fact of “debuting” in the role of the EU presiding state, but rather by the internal crisis. Taking over the Presidency after the very active France, contributed to overshadowing the Czech activity.

Success and failure

- The successes of the Czech Presidency include: action towards developing the concept of Eastern Partnership and negotiations on energy matters, adopting the Community part of the European Economic Recovery Plan, good organisation of the Presidency work from the administrative and technical point of view and cooperation with the third sector.
- The failures include: the internal political conflict which ended with the collapse of the government, which destroyed all the efforts made during the Presidency in the Council of the EU, failure to adopt the working time directive and some awkward activities aimed at solving the Middle East crisis.
- The Czech Presidency showed that problems in the political situation within the presiding country may overshadow even the good preparation of the organisational and content related aspects of the Presidency.
 - This should be an important signal for Poland in the context of the problem related to holding the parliamentary elections during the Polish Presidency of the EU Council. Any political gaffe will be noticed and very severely assessed by all other partners. Particularly negative in their assessment may be the so called “old” member states. The media in these countries pay more attention to

the functioning of the EU and the involvement of the Presidency in this process than do journalists from the “new” member states. Therefore any internal problems impeding the proper operation of the EU are usually very strongly criticised. The Czech experience will make them pay even closer attention to Poland to see if it is not committing similar mistakes to the ones made by the Czech Republic.

- That is why all the possible efforts should be made to avoid holding the parliamentary elections during the Presidency. Electoral campaign during that period would question not only the reputation of the government at the European scene but would also antagonise Polish political forces. Whereas their cooperation and consensus between them are vital for the success of the Presidency.
- It therefore seems reasonable to consider rescheduling parliamentary elections and holding them in 2010, together with the presidential and the local elections, so that the government elected as a result, have time to prepare for the Presidency.

Priorities

- The priorities set by the Czechs were right, as they reflected both the current needs of the EU agenda and tackled the issues close to the heart of the presiding state.
- The Czechs were properly prepared to act in the areas selected as priorities for their Presidency. However, on many occasions, they lacked the expertise in unexpected situations, which resulted in some unfortunate statements and delay in taking the necessary action. They were not sufficiently involved in

the issues that had not been defined as priorities. Therefore Polish administration should:

- Pay particular attention to good substantive preparation in all areas, not only those recognised as priorities, including development of an expert base in different fields. The activities currently undertaken by the MFA and the Office of the Committee for European Integration are a positive sign, showing the awareness of such necessity. This will allow Poland to respond effectively and quickly to crisis situations. Even if those situations turn out to be complicated and their solution will appear beyond the scope of Polish capability, having a team of Polish experts will make it possible to provide competent comments and develop ideas for solving the problems as well as seek appropriate assistance with other states.
 - Agree with the leading EU member states the models for communication and cooperation in potential crisis, in order to be able, when it actually happens, to seek effective support,
 - Develop a mechanism for defining the priorities so that they fit well the EU agenda and at the same time take account of possible unexpected changes in the international scene.
- The Czech Presidency confirmed that the adopted priorities should arise from the real needs of the European Union and the interests of the state presiding over its works. The media-friendly character of the subject is less important than the effectiveness with which it can be addressed and specific decisions can be made.
 - Initial plans to choose the Eastern Partnership and energy security as Polish priorities seem to be right. The presidencies preceding the Polish one should be closely monitored, especially the Swedish and

the Hungarian one, from the point of view of their activities in those areas, so that the specific objectives set for the Polish Presidency are possible to achieve within the six months.

- The Presidency objectives should be set by the government but should at the same time, be agreed with the other centres of power and the main political forces. An ideal situation would be if the objectives proposed by the government were widely accepted and were not questioned by any party in the parliament or the president. Only then would it be possible to achieve them and to successfully implement the adopted strategy.
- Regardless of what priorities are eventually selected, during the preparation for the Presidency and during the Presidency itself, it is important to think globally, in terms of the interests of the whole European Union, and not to be driven only by the interests of one's own state or region.

Organisation

- The Czechs proved themselves as organisers of EU meetings at different levels. Their professional preparation was well appreciated as was the provision of access to necessary materials, punctuality and communication. Poland should follow in their footsteps and get well prepared for the role of administrator and the host of EU meetings, because as a “new” member state it will be subjected to a very thorough scrutiny.
- The reluctance to provide detailed information during briefings, concealing certain issues, was the subject of criticism. Good communication content-wise is sometimes the foundation of successful cooperation with partners. Information that can be disclosed should be smoothly shared.
- Even a very interesting idea of promoting the country in Brussels may prove ineffective if there is a crisis within the country that diverts the attention of other EU members states towards its internal problems. Therefore, while

developing the promotion strategy, it is important to consider potential threats and prepare the methods of communication to handle the crisis.

The third sector

- The example of the Czech Republic shows that cooperation between the government administration and the third sector helps to ensure efficient Presidency and to promote it in an appropriate way. Polish government should, following the Czech example, involve specialists from non-governmental organisations to jointly work on the Presidency, use their support and their channels for communication with the public²⁵. Non-governmental organisations and think tanks may be effectively engaged in public diplomacy. This will help to promote Poland in the world.
- The government, together with the most competent non-governmental organisations, should hold an international conference on one of the priority topics that it will have adopted. Such an international event should be properly organised in order to raise its profile.

²⁵ More about the recommended ways of cooperation between the government administration and the third sector, see: L. Kolarska-Bobińska, J. Kucharczyk, A. Łada, E. Kaca, A. Sobańska: *Polska prezydencja w Radzie Unii Europejskiej: współpraca administracji publicznej z sektorem pozarządowym.* [Polish presidency in the European Union Council: cooperation between the government administration and the third sector] (pdf). Expert opinion prepared for the Office of the Committee for European Integration.

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