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A Not-so-Different New Polish Foreign Policy

'If the bride is poor and ugly, the least she can do is to be gracious' so said Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, Poland's former foreign minister, when commenting on the failings of Polish diplomacy under the leadership of the Kaczynski twins. The outgoing team's foreign policy was argumentative, amateurish and certainly not gracious. During their two-year rule the Kaczynski brothers chastised the Germans, refused to talk to the Russians and at times ignored most of their European partners. The only nation that they seemed to care about having good relations with was America, though there is scant evidence to suggest that this sentiment was actually reciprocated. In the introvert and paranoid world of the Kaczynski brothers there was little space for serious thought about the outside world. The Germans were guilty not just of invading Poland but, more importantly, of being pally with wishy-washy Polish liberals - those left-wingers who the Kaczynski's suspected of being Russian spies as well as the pro-European lobby, who the twins charged as being unpatriotic and morally dubious.

Civic Platform (PO), the party who won the Sunday election is liberal and outward-looking, its members feel at home in Berlin, London or Brussels. Donald Tusk, the party's leader was brought up in a bilingual Polish-German home in Gdansk and talks about Ireland as a model country that Poland should emulate. Civic Platform is not defensive vis-à-vis Europe, nor is it going to be slavish vis-à-vis the US. Does this mean that we can expect a Civic Platform-led government to pursue a new foreign policy, different both in substance and style from that of the grumpy twins? Those who are expecting a radical Spanish-style (from Aznar to Zapatero) change should prepare themselves for disappointment. The only certainty is that style and rhetoric will become more 'gracious' and diplomacy more professional.

The most radical aspect of the Kaczynski's foreign policy was its inept diplomatic service. Obsessed with conspiracy theories, the twins were convinced that the diplomatic service they inherited was made up of former communist spies and liberals. Some of this was probably true, certainly there were too many communist-era apparatchiks hanging around the corridors of the foreign office. But the way the outgoing government went about pursuing reform completely discredited the reasons why they were doing it. The Kaczynskis removed almost all first-rank professional diplomats and in many cases failed to replace them. Until recently 25 ambassadorial posts were vacant, including those in France and Portugal. The post of ambassador to the EU was vacant for months - an unheard of precedence in the European context. The result was a managerial catastrophe - official visits were not adequately prepared and were even cancelled. Morale in the foreign office hit rock bottom and foreign policy making became ad hoc and prone to knee-jerk reactions. Under Tusk one can expect a change in this area, which is important because style and professionalism matter in foreign policy.

But what about the substance? The German press seems convinced that the new government will be pro-European and pro-German. True that unlike the Kaczynski brothers Civic Platform does not harbour anti-German sentiments. This means that the atmosphere will indeed improve. However, the main bone of contention in the relationship - the Russo-German project to build a pipeline bypassing Poland and the Baltic states - will not go away and will continue to poison the relationship. Last year the pipeline was likened by the then Polish Defence Minister, Radek Sikorski, to the Ribentrop-Molotov pact, which had been the prelude to the Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939. Sikorski's words might have been dramatic but few eyebrows were raised in Poland. For quite understandable reasons the Poles are sceptical of exclusive German-Russian deals. In Western Europe Sikorski's words were seen as typical for the Kaczynski government. But don't be surprised if the same argument returns, since Sikorski (who switched sides) may well become Tusk's foreign minister.

What about Europe? The new Government's overall attitude towards the European Union is likely to be more embracing. Unlike the Kaczynskis, Civic Platform has endorsed the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. However, Civic Platform's pro-European stance is also assertive. It was Civic Platform, and not the Kaczynskis, that protested the loudest against the introduction of the new voting system in the EU that would diminish Poland's influence. When after the bad-tempered negotiations in Brussels in June 2007 Poland agreed to the

new voting system, the Kaczynski government was attacked at home by the opposition for going soft. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the new government, whilst being more diplomatic, may actually turn out to be a more difficult negotiating partner.

Lastly, there is also a tiny constitutional problem to overcome before Poland's foreign policy can become less Kaczynski-like. Namely, that until 2010 Lech Kaczynski will continue to be President, a post which includes many foreign policy competencies and powers.

Poland's new foreign policy will be more professional and more constructive. But it will not be less assertive. In other words, the bride will be more gracious and attractive but she may well remain difficult.

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