



PISM

POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

BULLETIN

No. 10 (1256), 21 January 2019 © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski • Bartosz Wiśniewski • Rafał Tarnogórski

Anna Maria Dyner • Sebastian Płóciennik • Patrycja Sasnal
Justyna Szczudlik • Jolanta Szymańska • Marcin Terlikowski • Tomasz Żornaczuk

“Cohesion as a Common European Value:” Romania’s EU Council Presidency

Jakub Pieńkowski

On 15 January, Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă announced the programme for the first Romanian presidency of the EU Council. As a neutral arbitrator, Romania wants to strengthen the EU’s cohesion, especially by equalising the Member States’ level of development. Most Polish and Romanian interests are concurrent. The presidency’s effectiveness may be limited by internal political conflicts and disputes with European institutions. The Member States’ concentration on Brexit, planned in March, and elections to the European Parliament (EP) in May, would not be conducive to the Romanian presidency’s success.

Presidency’s Plans. The main goal of the Romanian presidency is to strengthen EU cohesion through the further convergence of states and regions. This would guarantee stable economic growth and access for citizens to its results, which should increase the EU’s global competitiveness. The economy would be boosted by reforms strengthening the monetary and banking union. Dăncilă’s approval of a declaration that Romania will introduce the euro in 2024 should be recognised as confirmation of Romania’s aspirations. The presidency’s priority is to reduce disparities between Member States. Therefore, Bucharest wants to maintain current cohesion and agricultural policy funding in the next multi-annual budget, which should be approved by the new EP in autumn. These funds are crucial for furthering Romania’s development. Of an overall €351 billion regional policy budget for 2014–2020, this country will receive €23 billion (Poland is expected to receive €82.5 billion).

Romania considers itself to be the only state on the EU-NATO southeast flank determined to stop Russian aggression. Therefore, in the priority “Europe, a stronger global player,” it wants to strengthen the security of its neighbourhood, in particular the Black Sea basin. This is the direction in which Romania wants to shape the Common Foreign and Security Policy, EU cooperation with NATO, development of the Three Seas Initiative, and reactivation of the Black Sea Synergy. In addition, although this is not an official priority, Bucharest has relaunched legislative work on the gas directive, which had been blocked by [the Austrian presidency](#). It will bring all gas pipelines in the EU into line with the energy package regulation, which would not block the construction of Nord Stream 2, but would increase its cost significantly.

Similar to [the previous Bulgarian](#) and Austrian presidencies, Romania promotes enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans. Therefore, it will convene conferences in May to transfer experiences about the implementation of public procurement law acquis, and concerning youth aspirations in this region. Particular attention will be devoted to neighbouring Serbia. A few days before the start of the Romanian presidency, [a meeting in the Varna format \(involving the Serbian president and the prime ministers of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania\)](#) took place in Bucharest. Dăncilă has also invited President Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia to visit Romania this semester. The Romanian presidency also supports the Eastern Partnership. On the occasion of its 10th anniversary, a high-level conference will be held in Brussels in May to initiate work on a cooperation programme with the EU after 2020. On this matter, there will be additional meetings of ministers of telecommunications in March (when the joint telecommunications strategy will be

negotiated there) and energy in April, as well as a business forum in June. [Romania's attention would be focused on Moldova, because of common special ties](#), and on Ukraine, as a target of Russian aggression.

Romania has also proposed other areas important for its security to work under the presidency. It wants to promote measures against disinformation and cyberthreats, as it belongs to an informal group of countries striving to attribute each cyberattack to the relevant state, and to punish the organiser with sanctions. In addition, Bucharest has voiced support for the launch of the European Public Prosecutor's Office. Furthermore, Romania underlines its commitment to migration policy, strengthening external borders and Frontex. It wants to convince Member States that [blocking Romanian accession to the Schengen zone](#) is not only double standards, but also weakens the security of the entire EU.

Challenges and Limitations. Romania's readiness to hold the presidency was of concern to EU institutions. Three days before the presidency started, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission (EC), questioned Romania's substantive preparation and the ability of President Klaus Iohannis (head of foreign policy under the Romanian constitution) to cooperate with his country's ruling coalition of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE). In November, Iohannis accused Dăncilă and PSD leader Liviu Dragnea of not preparing Romania for the presidency. This dispute overlapped with the resignation of Victor Negrescu, the minister for European Affairs, responsible for preparation, caused by the factional fights in the PSD. As a result, Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, whose country will take over the presidency in July, offered to switch dates with Romania. However, the Romanian government, including Foreign Minister Teodor Meleșcanu and the new European Affairs Minister George Ciamba, gave assurances of Romania's readiness for the presidency.

The presidency's efficacy could be hindered by intra-Romanian competition. In recent months, Dragnea's society has sharply attacked Corina Crețu (PSD member and Romanian Commissioner for Regional Development) and Angela Cristea (the head of the EC Delegation to Bucharest). Iohannis also refused to nominate ministers of transport and regional development from Dragnea's close political society. This may present a procedural problem during the session of the EU Ministerial Councils. Romanian disputes, damaging the image of the presidency, may also be visible during its central event, the informal summit of the European Council on 9 May to Sibiu. It is planned to adopt a strategic declaration for 2019-2024 at the summit, giving new dynamics to the EU after Brexit. Dăncilă has expressed her willingness to chair the summit, but this has been vetoed by Iohannis who, in accordance with a 2012 ruling of the Constitutional Court, only the president may represent Romania at the European Council. Given that a presidential election is due in autumn, the Romanian government may try to challenge Iohannis' mandate, especially in Sibiu, where he was mayor until 2014.

The first half of 2019 will be dominated by the United Kingdom's exit from the EU, planned for 29 March, but this issue will be a marginal part of the Romanian presidency's work. Only a no-deal Brexit would change this, because the European Council would need to define the EC's mandate for new negotiations with the UK. According to Ciamba, urgent legislative work of the presidency would mainly concern the mutual protection of citizens' rights. However, Brexit will demand the attention of the EU countries and institutions, which may weaken their involvement in the Romanian presidency's initiatives. Ultimately, the activity of the EU institutions and, as a result, of the presidency, would end in May. This would be due to the European Union elections (23-26 May), after which negotiations on the autumn appointment of a new EC and president of the European Council will begin.

Conclusions and Prospects. The rivalry between the Romanian government and Iohannis, combined with Brexit and the end of the term of the European institutions, could limit the presidency's effectiveness. Romania has no ambition to initiate a debate on thorough reform of the EU. Its priority is to maintain an effective cohesion policy in the post-Brexit multi-annual budget, with the goal of improving convergence of the development level of EU countries. This corresponds to the interests of Poland, as do other goals such as the fight against disinformation, EU and NATO cooperation, and counteracting Nord Stream 2 by making it subject to EU legislation. On the other hand, Romanian and Polish interests may diverge on matters such as migration policy and greater autonomy for Frontex. Neither is the declared support for the European Public Prosecutor's Office credible in the face [of current coalition attempts to stop domestic criminal trials against politicians](#), and disputes between the Romanian government, the EP and the EC. Assurances given by the EU institutions that the Romanian presidency will still take the procedure under Article 7 of the EU Treaty on Poland and Hungary "very seriously" lack credibility too. Unlike the Austrian presidency, Romania probably will avoid this issue, due to the Dăncilă government's concerns regarding the application of Article 7 against its country.

The Romanian presidency's plans regarding cooperation with the countries of the Eastern Partnership do find parallels with Polish interests. The tenth-anniversary conference could be used to present the Polish vision of this programme after 2020, and to encourage EU partners to engage more in it. A business forum could also help Polish companies develop contacts in the Eastern Partnership countries. Nevertheless, Poland should be very cautious about the Dăncilă government's support for [oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, who rules Moldova and compromises the idea of European integration](#).