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## **Parliamentary dimension of the Polish presidency**

### **Introduction**

The process of European integration has contributed to a significant concentration of member states' political power in the hands of a bureaucratic-executive elite. This has been a result of European Union institutions discriminating in favor of national administrations rather than respective parliamentary institutions. Thereby, a European pattern of supremacy of the executive elite has been established, based on a mechanism of strict cooperation, and a system of institutional links between European and national bureaucracies. Unfortunately, national parliaments and the European Parliament were significantly late in responding to this process. This resulted in a lack of efficient methods to monitor political decision-makers and officials as regards their activity in the European forum. Not only has the integration system undermined the general powers of nation-states, but it has created a powerful bureaucracy whose competences have significantly increased on account of its international connections (Czachór, 2004, pp. 266–271). Additionally, the logic of resolving conflicts within the EU by means of negotiations in the framework of 'community-intergovernmental co-operation' has resulted in the supervisory role of (national) parliaments becoming highly illusory (Herbut, 1998, p. 313).

From year to year, the role of national parliaments has been decreasing also in regard to the presidency. It was reduced to a mechanical implementation (harmonization) of Community principles, limited control over the activity and main directions of national governments' policies, and the consent to admit new states and change treaties. The influence of national parliaments on Community policy by virtue of exercising their scrutinizing powers has mainly been expressed by means of pressurizing national governments or their individual members. This has been done in order to work out a joint position with the parliament (or parliamentary commission) that could next be presented by the government (minister) in negotia-

tions at EU level as regards a given area of Community policy or a specific matter.

The relations between national parliaments, the European Community and the European Union can historically be divided into several stages. The first one started in 1979 when, after the first direct elections to the European Parliament (EP), national parliaments lost the right to appoint representatives to the EP. Thereby, direct contacts between member states' parliaments and the EP were formally curbed (Popławska, 2002, p. 198).

The second stage started in 1989, which marked the beginning of sessions held by specialized committees for European integration, appointed by national parliaments. These sessions assumed, among others, the form of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC – *Conference des organes specialises dans les affaires communautaires des parlements de la Communauté européenne*), which is a formalized non-treaty form of co-operation established by the EP and national parliaments of European Union member states (Jaskiernia, 2002, p. 19).

The Maastricht Treaty provided innovative stipulations in the declaration on the role of national parliaments in the European Union. It ascertained that national parliaments should be more active in the European Union by means of intensified information exchange and meetings between national parliaments and the EP. Member states' governments were obliged to provide their national parliaments with access to the draft legal regulations of the Committee within a timeframe that would allow parliaments to examine them (Pöhle, 1992, pp. 72–73).

Another qualitative change in this respect was introduced by the protocol attached to the Amsterdam Treaty concerning the role of national parliaments and subsidiarity in the EU. The protocol stipulated that the supervision exercised by national parliaments over their respective governments as concerns European integration is not the competence of the EU but is a matter for a given organization and the constitutional practice of each member state.

The debate on this topic that followed the Nice Treaty was based on the declaration on the future of the EU which called for strengthening of the role of national parliaments in the European architecture. This declaration was adopted by the European Council in Laeken, fully confirming the necessity of involving national parliaments directly in the decision-making process at Union level. It was in this context that proposals were made to establish a second chamber of the EP, comprised of the representatives of national parliaments. Discussions also started on enabling national

parliaments to participate in the debate on the future shape of the European Union, which in practice resulted in the representatives of national parliaments taking part in the work of the European Convent (Barcz, 2002, p. 116).

The Convent's Working Group IV on the role of national parliaments (CONV 353/02) paid particular attention to: (1) the role of national parliaments in scrutinizing governments (national scrutiny systems); (2) the role of national parliaments in monitoring the application of the principle of subsidiarity; (3) the role and function of multilateral networks or mechanisms involving national parliaments at the European level (CONV 67/1/02).

Summing up this brief history of European parliamentarism in the period up to the Lisbon Treaty, the following conclusions may be drawn. First, a specific technology of exercising power (Toffler, 1997, p. 635) in the European Union, based on the principles of checks and balances, resulted in two levels of parliamentarism being present in the integration system, one national, and the other – European. Each level has had its powers for many years, having created a specific and autonomous political mechanism. Second, parliamentary powers at the national and Community levels were institutionally (in terms of structure and personnel) and functionally separated. Third, the provisions of the treaties and political structure of the Community and European Union have minimized the role and significance of national parliaments, emphasizing the legislative and decision-making position of the Council of the European Union. At the beginning of integration, the powers of the European Parliament were quite moderate, too. It was only following the Maastricht Treaty, and subsequent treaty amendments, that the EP gained considerable strength.

It was only later that the process of integration turned out not to lead to the powers of nation-states being curtailed, or actually vanishing, but rather to creating a strong bureaucracy, whose power has significantly grown, on account of transnational relations. The European Community and European Union, as well as public (central and local) government administrations of member states have begun to transform into a technocracy aiming to control the entire integration system. Additionally, the European Parliament itself hindered the task of national parliaments, as it was not their actual ally, but was trying to expand its own 'zone of power and influence' in the system of the European Union (Czachór, 2006; 2008).

Finally, the implicit competences of member states that could theoretically be inferred from the principle of subsidiarity did not automatically

mean an increased role for their national parliaments. Assigning competence to a member state did not automatically translate into the competence of its national parliament, which had to build its actual status, co-operating with the institutions of executive power, since they were the only ones empowered to take a stance in the forums of EU institutions.

With reference to the amendments made in the Lisbon Treaty, and adopted from the Constitutional Treaty that has failed to enter into force, it is worth pausing to examine their relation to the process of incorporation of national parliaments in the institutional system of the EU. It is important inasmuch as for the first time in the history of integration national parliaments came to be treated as an integral part of the EU's democratic structure, and it was acknowledged that the powers of neither side of parliamentarism should clearly predominate (Ludwikowska, 1999, p. 91–92).

The amendments introduced in this respect to the Lisbon Treaty resulted also from the permanent integration crises which have forced political decision-makers to bear in mind the importance and role of national parliamentarism for European integration. This issue became even more topical, given that the methods and models for managing integration on the basis of collaboration between the Council of the EU and the EP that had been applied before did not remove the disturbances and dysfunctionality of this management, not to mention the decreasing trust of citizens towards integration.

The 'communitarisation' of national parliaments has become a fact. They have been assigned a stabilizing role in the relations that occur in several fields. One involves the interaction between the EU and member states. National parliaments play a significant intermediary role here. The second one concerns the interaction between executive and legislative power on the Community and national levels in all conceivable combinations. The third one applies to the field of the legitimization of EU power, where national parliaments have much to say.

In line with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, national parliaments were granted the powers to: (1) obtain from EU institutions (including the Council of the EU and its presidency) information and draft legislative acts as stipulated in the *Protocol on the role of national parliaments in the European Union*; (2) ensure respect for the principle of subsidiarity in line with procedures provided in the *Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality*; (3) take part in the subsystem of integration, concerning freedom, security and justice; (4) take part in pro-

cedures to amend the treaties; (6) obtain information on applications for accession to the EU (6) take part in inter-parliamentary collaboration between national parliaments and the EP (Barcz, 2007, pp. 2–7).

The *Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality* attached to the Lisbon Treaty has reinforced the system of monitoring the subsidiarity principle by national parliaments, which is commonly called the early warning mechanism. The regulations (the ‘Yellow Card’ procedure) provided for there make it possible for national parliaments to directly influence EU legislature. This mainly concerns the requirement that the European Commission delivers draft legislative acts to national parliaments on the same principle as it does with respect to the EP and EU Council. National parliaments can assess them in terms of financial outcomes, qualitative and quantitative indicators, minimization of the financial and administrative burdens imposed on the EU, national governments, regional or local authorities, business entities and citizens.

The consequence of these changes, aimed at the anti-crisis empowerment of national parliaments, involved the strengthening of relations between parliaments and executive powers in member states. The belief that, if governments strictly followed the guidelines of their respective parliaments, all compromise in the EU Council would be impossible, and the EU would become inoperable, is gradually becoming a matter of the past. Nowadays, the model of the consultative role of parliaments has been replaced by the post-Lisbon collaboration, involving co-deciding and respecting the standpoints of national parliaments in negotiations at EU level. This is accompanied by a parliamentary mechanism of change in the system of the EU, where parliaments partake in ratifying treaties, conventions and other agreements that the EU enters into on its own, or on their behalf. This is about revisions to existing treaties as well as accession treaties, association treaties, conventions concluded between member states, and other agreements to which the EU, third parties or international organizations are a party (Grzeszczak, 2000, p. 8). While provisions to this effect are mainly stipulated in the respective constitutions of member states, they are of primary importance for further integration and the legitimization of EU authority.

The Lisbon Treaty has introduced methods of efficient parliamentary supervision and scrutiny over governmental and Community administration as regards their activity in European form, thus allowing for numerous problems, disputes and crises to be overcome. On the other hand, however, it has to be concluded that claims that the Lisbon Treaty has

'cured' the EU parliamentary system are a myth. This technical-bureaucratic autonomy could do without democratic and political entities and organs which only disturb its governance, and the matter is not helped by the logic of resolving conflicts within the EU by means of negotiations in the framework of 'Community-intergovernmental collaboration' (Herbut, 1998, p. 313).

The strengthening of national parliaments in the integration system of the EU has also been directly linked with the presidency and its parliamentary dimension. The beginnings of the involvement of national parliaments go back to the period before the Lisbon Treaty. This is confirmed by the document adopted on July 4, 2004, *Guidelines on the inter-parliamentary collaboration in the European Union*. It assumes that the parliamentary dimension of the presidency encompasses two parts: national, organized within the parliament of the member state holding the EU presidency, and a Community/EU one, organized by the parliament of the member state holding the EU presidency and the EP.

The latter part of the parliamentary dimension of the presidency concerns collaboration with the EP and is based primarily on the meetings of the representatives of the parliament of the country holding the presidency and those of the EP. These involve joint parliamentary sessions and joint meetings of parliamentary committees. Another permanent element of collaboration involves the activity of the EP, such as public hearings and meetings of specialized committees of the European Parliament, where the participation of MPs from the presiding country is emphasized (Czachór, 2012).

### **Parliamentary dimensions of the EU Council presidency**

This text examines the parliamentary dimension of the Polish presidency, which contributed to the new dynamics of European integration and the political and institutional framework of the European Union after the Lisbon Treaty. Due to the transfer of powers to European level, the role of national parliaments has been significantly increased. The parliaments of the EU member states can no longer be seen as 'losers' in the integration process. To the present day, a lot of forms of cooperation at European level have been established, helping national parliaments to gain influence over developments at the supranational level. Cooperation with other parliaments, and in particular the European Parliament, has become an integral

part of their day-to-day affairs. National parliaments are gradually developing into participants of the EU's multi-level game (Maurer, 2001, pp. 1–4).

The Treaty of Lisbon opened the doors to a greater role for national parliaments in European Union affairs (Szili, 2009). The new treaty, sometimes referred to as the 'Treaty of Parliaments', extended and reinforced the tools available for national parliaments. Such tools may be fully implemented and used thanks to inter-parliamentary cooperation, which should also facilitate introducing European issues into parliamentary debates. The Lisbon Treaty has given national parliaments, together with the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament large responsibility to scrutinize all legislative and non legislative initiatives.

In article 5 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) national parliaments ensure compliance with the principle of subsidiarity in accordance with the procedure set out in *Protocol no 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality*. Article 12 of the TEU states that national parliaments actively contribute to the good functioning of the Union. Article 10 of the TEU emphasizes the democratic accountability of governments to their national parliaments, which is primarily of symbolic significance in the context of the sovereignty and autonomy of the member states.

Specific provisions on the competences of national parliaments are contained in the TEU and in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TfEU) in two protocols: *Protocol no 1 on the role of national parliaments in the EU* and *Protocol no 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality*, annexed to the TEU, TfEU and Treaty Establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (TEAEC) under the Treaty of Lisbon.

To improve the process of policy formulation and bring the EU closer to its citizens the Commission sends its new proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments for them to give input (Commission Communication *A Citizens' Agenda – Delivering Results for Europe* – 2006). This has become the so-called 'political dialogue' with national parliaments. This is particularly valuable when it comes to deciding whether action is needed at local, regional, national or EU level (subsidiarity) and how to make sure that EU action does not go beyond what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaty (proportionality).

In connection with *The Guidelines for Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union* adopted by the Conference of Speakers of the

European Union Parliaments (EUSC) in the Hague in 2004 and amended in Lisbon in 2008, national parliaments contribute actively to the good functioning and increase of the democratic legitimacy of the European Union. Member states are represented in the Council of the European Union by their governments, themselves democratically accountable to their national parliaments. Inter-parliamentary cooperation respects all the principles and rules established in the framework of the European Union. In addition, inter-parliamentary cooperation respects the principle of national parliaments and the European Parliament being on an equal footing and having complementary roles in the EU structure.

The main objectives of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union are: (1) to promote the exchange of information and best practices between the national parliaments of the European Parliament with a view to reinforcing parliamentary control, influence and scrutiny at all levels; (2) to ensure effective exercise of parliamentary competences in EU matters in particular in the area of monitoring the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality; (3) to promote cooperation with parliaments from third countries.

Inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union is performed within the institutional system framework based on the following five components. (1) Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments consists of Speakers of the Parliaments of EU member states and the President of the European Parliament. The Conference oversees the coordination of inter-parliamentary EU activities. The organization of the Conference is conducted in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Conference of Presiding Officers*. (2) COSAC – Conference of European Affairs Committees enables regular exchange of information, best practices and views on European Union matters between European Affairs Committees of national parliaments and the European Parliament. (3) Joint Meetings on Topics of Common Interest are organized by the parliament of the country holding the presidency and the European Parliament, e.g., Joint Committee Meetings and Joint Parliamentary Meetings. (4) Meetings of Sectoral Committees are organized by national parliaments or the European Parliament for the purpose of discussing European Union topics within their fields of competence. In arranging meetings of sectoral committees, national parliaments of countries holding the EU presidency and the European Parliament should avoid duplication of activity. (5) Secretaries-General or other designated officials convene regularly in order to prepare the agendas and debates of the Conference of Speakers of the Eu-



ropean Union Parliaments and to settle any other business that is deemed necessary. Meetings of the Secretaries-General are prepared and chaired by the Secretary-General or other designated officials of the Parliament that holds the presidency of the Conference of Speakers, having consulted the preceding and the following presidencies.

Additional provisions on technical practices and procedures can be adopted by the Secretaries-General Representatives of National Parliaments to the EU National Parliaments'. Representatives contribute to reinforcing inter-parliamentary cooperation by facilitating the regular exchange of information both between national parliaments and between national parliaments and European institutions.

Inter-parliamentary cooperation with the presidency is practiced in the following fields: (1) exchange of information and best practice between national parliaments and with the European Parliament in all policy-fields; (2) the main field for inter-parliamentary cooperation is covered by the Treaties of the European Union, mainly in what regards procedures for parliamentary scrutiny of European Union matters; (3) national parliaments have a key role to play in monitoring the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. In order to facilitate effective scrutiny, national parliaments are encouraged to exchange information on EU draft legislation and its compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

The parliamentary engagement of member countries in deeper cooperation in Europe is regulated by a complex system of instruments. The main one is IPEX. It is a platform for electronic exchange of information on all EU-related parliamentary activities. IPEX should, among other things, facilitate the exchange of information between parliaments with regard to EU draft legislation, including its compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The calendar of inter-parliamentary meetings of the European Union is also available on the IPEX website.

We must not forget here about the special relationship between national parliaments and the European Parliament. Cooperation between the national parliaments of EU member states and the European Parliament has intensified and broadened in scope in recent two years. The European Parliament and the country holding the presidency also regularly invite representatives from national parliaments to meetings and conferences in Brussels or in the capital of the country holding the presidency. When possible, delegations of members of the national parliaments from the relevant sectoral committees and/or from the European affairs committees

will also participate in these conferences (The Danish Parliament's EU Information Centre, 2012, p. 23).

### **Documents and the main directions of the national parliament's activity in the period of the Polish presidency**

One of the most important elements of the efficiency of the Polish presidency was its participation in inter-parliamentary cooperation with EU national parliaments and the European Parliament. The presidency took place at a particular moment – during discussions on the shape of the new role of national parliaments in the system of European integration. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and increased role of national parliaments in the decision-making process and legislation in the European Union strengthened the importance of the parliamentary dimension of the EU presidency. The main task of the national parliament in this period was to prepare and hold meetings in accordance with the inter-parliamentary cooperation schedule and to realize the presidency's priorities. In this way, the Polish parliament supported actions implemented by the government. In connection with this, the priorities of the Polish presidency in its parliamentary dimension included the Eastern Partnership, European budget for 2014–2020, energy security, Common Security and Defense Policy, agricultural policy and cohesion policy.

Poland's cooperation with the other states of the presidency trio also had its parliamentary dimension. On 15 May 2010, the Parliament Speakers signed the *Declaration on cooperation among the Houses of the Parliaments of Poland, Denmark and Cyprus in connection with the preparation and accomplishment of the parliamentary dimension of the Presidencies of the three European Union Member States, 1 July 2011–31 December 2012*. In the *Declaration*, the parliaments of the trio pledged: (a) mutual support during the preparation and accomplishment of the parliamentary dimension of the presidency, at the level of the speakers of the parliaments of the trio, committees on European Union affairs and other parliamentary agencies, if it is essential for the implementation of the presidency's program; (b) to exchange information on programs, subjects and formula of the meetings to be held during the presidency; (c) to coordinate their cooperation with the European Parliament on questions connected with the accomplishment of the parliamentary dimension, taking into consideration the systems of exercising presidency over the Con-

ference of Speakers of European Union Parliaments and the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees (COSAC).

During Poland's six-month rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union COSAC meetings, sectoral committee meetings at the committee chairpersons' level, and Joint Parliamentary Meetings were organized together with the European Parliament, as well as conferences and seminars. The Polish parliament was organizer and host of the European Union Speakers Conference (EUSC) meeting in spring 2012, too. Between July and December 2011, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, President Bronisław Komorowski, government ministers and many other representatives of Poland's administration visited the European Parliament. Polish ministers took part in a total of 36 debates during the European Parliament's plenary sessions and 30 committee meetings. A series of informal "Meet the Presidency" debates between Council representatives and MEPs on key European issues, initiated by Poland, became a trademark of the Polish presidency in the European Parliament.

### **The main meetings, sessions and conferences carried out by the presidency**

The Polish presidency of the Council of the European Union began on July 1, 2011, with a ceremonial sitting of the Sejm and Senate attended by President Bronisław Komorowski, Speaker of the Sejm Grzegorz Schetyna, Speaker of the Senate Bogdan Borusewicz, Prime Minister Donald Tusk and members of the government. The Speaker of the Sejm stressed the importance of that day for Poland and the Poles: "Today, we are presiding over a united Europe. We are standing tall and proud to represent the entire continent, where human rights are a source of power, while decisions on the future of our community arise from parliamentary approval." When talking about the strengthening of the EU democratic mandate, pursuant to the Lisbon Treaty and the parliamentary dimensions of the Polish presidency, the Speaker of the Sejm underlined that we would be the architects of relations between national parliaments. The Speaker of the Senate emphasized in his speech that Poland would be the 'EU flagship' for the following six months and it would be our competence, knowledge, efficiency and diplomatic skills that would decide whether we would be able to stand up to the occasion and prove effective in solving the problems faced by Europe (Parliamentary Dimension,

2012). President Bronisław Komorowski stated that the opening Polish presidency of the EU Council was “the realization of dreams that many generations have had about joining the Western world permanently.” He also stressed that the presidency would be a test of Poland’s responsibility for Europe. The ceremony also featured special broadcast messages from the President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek and László Kövér – the Speaker of the parliament of Hungary, who presided over the EU during the first half of 2011. In his video broadcast, Jerzy Buzek stressed that the European Union highly praised the priorities of the Polish presidency. “These priorities cannot be realized without close cooperation with the European Parliament” (Parliamentary Dimension, 2012).

The series of meetings as part of the parliamentary dimension of the Polish presidency was initiated by the conference of the Chairpersons of Defense Affairs Committees of EU Member States (CODACC) entitled: “EU – NATO after Lisbon – a new concept of challenges and threats.” During the two-day meeting (3–5.07.2011), the participants decided that it was important to initiate a discussion on revising EU security strategy and to endeavor to make cooperation with NATO more effective. The CODACC opening ceremony was attended by the Speaker of the Sejm Grzegorz Schetyna, President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski, Minister of National Defense Bogdan Klich and Head of the National Security Bureau Stanisław Koziej. The Speaker stated that during its presidency, Poland would seek to contribute to the development of the practical dimension of EU and NATO relations. “As recent developments on external European borders have demonstrated, it is in the best interests of both organizations to improve their cooperation in terms of common security and defense policy. As the Libyan crisis has shown to us all, EU and NATO cooperation is a must when a conflict may only be resolved by political means combined with military ones, as we have recently experienced” – added the Speaker. “The NATO missile defense shield, which has been supported by Poland from the very beginning, is an indicator that in a time of limited financial resources, when we are seeking solutions that are optimal from the point of view of relations with other countries, such as Russia, our joint efforts will allow more effective expenditure and a more effective defense system” – stressed the President B. Komorowski (CODACC, 2011a). At the plenary session of the CODACC meeting the Minister of National Defense Bogdan Klich presented the *Priorities of the Polish Security and Defense Policy*. The Minister acquainted parliamentary representatives of EU member states with the priorities of the Polish

presidency. One of these priorities was to ensure better security and defense capabilities in Europe. Poland supported the strengthening of the Common Security and Defense Policy and had concrete ideas on how to improve the rapid reaction procedures in crisis situations. During the presidency, Poland focused on the following priorities: development of CSDP capabilities, harmonization of military and civil planning mechanisms, improving battlegroups' usability, improving EU military planning structures, deepening EU cooperation with eastern neighbors in the fields of security and defence as well as strengthening EU-NATO relations (Klich, 2011).

At the first session of the CODACC conference, Maciej Popowski – the Deputy Head of EU diplomacy (Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service – EEAS), spoke about the role of the EEAS in the development of a Common European Security and Defense Policy. Popowski expressed the opinion that our country would be able to inject new energy into the common undertaking embodied by the European External Action Service. He stated that the Polish presidency coincided with a period of strategic, structural and financial changes that are of extreme significance for Europe. According to Popowski, EU foreign policy should be strong, cohesive and transparent, in order to gain the support of citizens and to contribute to strengthening European identity. He also admitted that there had been changes in current foreign policy, which had started fighting for such values as the interests and safety of the citizens, new jobs and access to markets, energy safety and modern migration policy (Popowski, 2011).

Russia's expectations towards the European Union and its perspective on the Eastern Partnership were discussed by Professor Adam Daniel Rotfeld. The former Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Poland explained that the Russian concept of the new system of European security was based on three pillars: the United States, the European Union and Russia. The professor recalled the catalogue of joint challenges and threats defined by the NATO-Russia Council at the Lisbon NATO summit in November 2010. This list includes, among others, international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, piracy, drug trafficking and money-laundering. Victor A. Ozerov, Chairman of the Council of the Russian Federation Committee on Defence assessed the challenges of the 21st century from the Russian perspective. In his opinion, both Europe and the entire world are currently experiencing a rather serious evolution in the areas of politics and security. "We are all at the stage where there is both

a possibility and faith in that we may move from a balance of powers to a balance of interests, from global opposition in the military and other spheres to multi-dimensional cooperation” – stated Ozerov. “It would seem to me that this dialogue which is taking place now with regard to the agreement on European security is not yet finished. Russia would not want to have the right to play the dominant role in creating this new architecture of European security. Our offer is an offer of dialogue, an offer of talks” said Ozerov. He also added that the Russian Federation sees the European Union as its natural partner. In the course of debates, parliamentarians from EU member states and Russia discussed, among other things, the need for finding innovative, non-institutional solutions in the dialogue with Russia, building trust in EU-Russia relations and efforts to achieve closer cooperation between these parties. The talks also concerned the German proposal to create an EU-Russia Committee dealing with foreign and security policy as well as including Russia in the work of the Weimar Triangle (CODACC, 2011b).

In September 2011, the Chairs of Foreign Affairs Committees of EU Member States (COFACC), as well as invited guests, discussed the issue of the EU’s obligations towards its neighbors, in particular towards the Eastern Partnership countries. Developing the Eastern Partnership, initiated by Poland and Sweden, was one of the priorities of the Polish presidency. The participants stressed the need for member states to support democratic processes both in eastern and southern neighbor states. The discussions were devoted to Europe’s commitments in the context of the Eastern Partnership. This was yet another conference organized jointly by the Sejm and Senate as part of the parliamentary dimension of the Polish presidency. Speaker of the Sejm, Grzegorz Schetyna, said that through the Eastern Partnership, the European Union supported the transformation of partner states into developed democracies that respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and economic freedom. In his view, partnership and neighborhood in the south and east show that, even despite the crisis, Europe is committed to openness and solidarity as its fundamental underlying values. He said he considered these values the most important items in the European Union’s democratic code (COFACC, 2011a). Leon Kieres, Chairperson of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, said that the dynamic development of the international situation and an unstable world needed a European Union that pursues an effective and cohesive foreign policy. He also emphasized that, even despite differences, the meetings of parliamentarians show that it is possible to work out

joint positions in politics, as great challenges in foreign policy can only be tackled by acting jointly and in the spirit of solidarity.

“The rotational presidency strengthens the European Union. Holding the presidency for the first time is a great challenge for Poland that requires strategic planning on the national and European level. It is also a chance to co-create the EU” – said Secretary of State Jan Borkowski. Poland assumed the presidency at a time that is difficult for the EU – the economic crisis and problems of the euro area intensified anti-EU sentiments. He considered it important to develop the EURO PLUS package, which maintains the cohesion of the EU, and to finalize negotiations on the so-called ‘six-pack’. He also emphasized that the economy should be better monitored to avoid another possible crisis. In connection with discussions that started on the multiannual financial framework for 2014–2020, Minister Borkowski said that member states were aiming to reduce the common budget, but the traditional cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy remained equally important. He considered cooperation in the area of foreign policy and security policy important to all countries involved. He declared that the second Eastern Partnership summit was scheduled to take place on September 29–30 in Warsaw, and expressed his hope that the decisions made at the summit would benefit the entire EU. Another meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was to take place in November in Poznań (Borkowski, 2011).

Representatives of Eastern Partnership countries spoke with one voice about the program’s role in the development of their countries and their integration efforts. They expressed their hopes associated with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eastern Partnership Summit, which would provide an opportunity to strengthen the mutual cooperation and define its strategic goals. Aleksandr Milinkevich warned against imposing premature economic sanctions on Belarus which would have a damaging effect on the country’s economy and strengthen the authority of the regime (COFACC, 2011b).

Chairpersons of Foreign Affairs Committees from Parliaments of EU member states, countries aspiring to accession, special guests and representatives of the European Parliament discussed the future of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, too. They debated the institutional proposal that was to be introduced, that guarantees monitoring and cooperation of the European Parliament with representatives of national parliaments in the area of creation and supervision of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (COFACC, 2011c).

One of the most important events of the parliamentary dimension of the Polish presidency was the conference of Chairpersons of the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC), held in October 2011. This was the largest event of the parliamentary dimension of the Polish presidency, jointly organized by the Sejm and the Senate. Representatives of the European affairs committees of EU member states emphasized the need to enhance legislative work and undertake extensive public consultation, which they thought indispensable for improving the planning and implementation of future EU budgets. COSAC welcomed the active involvement of national parliaments in subsidiarity checks under *Protocol 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality* of the Treaty of Lisbon. EU parliamentarians pointed out the new possibilities given to national parliaments by the Treaty of Lisbon. In particular they underlined the value of close and open cooperation between member state parliaments and the European Commission. They also highlighted the scrutiny function of national parliaments (COSAC, 2011a).

The cooperation between the European Commission, national parliaments and the European Parliament following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon was the focus of a speech given by the Vice-president of the European Commission for inter-institutional relations and administration, Maroš Šefčovič. This representative of the European Commission stressed the importance of political dialogue, which should not be based solely on the written exchange of positions, but go beyond institutional and administrative-cum-bureaucratic frameworks. He added that the crisis should be treated as an opportunity and a good moment for implementing the necessary changes. Šefčovič said that national parliaments were responsible for the dynamics of change. In 2010, the European Commission received 37 opinions on the subsidiarity principle and 418 opinions were submitted as part of political dialogue on legislative proposals, communications, opinions and suggestions for improving the Commission's work. The dialogue between the European Commission and the national parliaments is supported by the new ASAP IT system which enables better monitoring of incoming queries (COSAC, 2011b).

The Secretary of State for European Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mikołaj Dowgielewicz, presented the progress made in the implementation of the priorities of the Polish presidency of the EU. The European Union was experiencing an identity crisis, mainly due to economic problems such as the common currency, loss of citizen trust in the states,



financial markets' trust in the states or member states' trust in one another. In his opinion, the main achievement of the Polish presidency was to reach a compromise as regards the EU's economic strategy. An example of such compromise is the so-called 'six-pack', which we were able to approve with the European Parliament, he added. Mikołaj Dowgielewicz explained that the 'six-pack' constituted the backbone of real economic governance in the EU. In his opinion, the decision on adopting the 'six-pack' denied the opinions that the cooperation among individual EU institutions was ineffective. The Secretary of State for European Affairs stressed that the process of rebuilding trust also included the debate on economic growth (COSAC, 2011c).

During the debates, parliamentarians from the EU committee of national parliaments also discussed the common security and defense policy, EU-NATO cooperation and EU enlargement plans. Participants also spoke of their hopes for the 'six-pack', adopted recently by the European Parliament, the COSAC conference as an important element of a coordinated EU policy, as well as the cooperation of the Polish presidency with the European Parliament (COSAC, 2011d).

The final parliamentary activity of the Polish presidency was the meeting of Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, convened in Warsaw on April 19–21, 2012, upon the joint invitation of the Speakers of the Sejm and the Senate of the Republic of Poland. The meeting was attended by the Speakers (or their representatives) from 37 houses of 24 European Union member states and by the Vice-President of the European Parliament. The Conference was also attended by Speakers (or their representatives) of parliaments of the six EU candidate countries. The representative of the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia attended the Conference for the first time after the Republic of Serbia was granted candidate status in 2012.

With regard to the point, "The crisis of European unity, what shall we do?" Speakers pointed to the fact that the current crisis in the European Union, which had not only an economic and financial dimension but also a social dimension, contributed to aggravating problems related to European integration and might eventually impair the internal cohesion of the Union. They stressed that the scale of the crisis and its multi-faceted nature required that the discussion on the future of the European Union should be conducted in a structured, rational and concrete manner, since only in such a way could it become an effective instrument in the struggle for European unity. On the topic of "Parliamentary control of the Common

Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP)” the Conference of Speakers decided on an Inter-Parliamentary Conference for CFSP and CSDP. This was the most important political decision since the Lisbon Treaty, one which broke the impasse in inter-parliamentary cooperation in this difficult part of European integration. The Inter-Parliamentary Conference will be composed of delegations of the national parliaments of the EU member states and the European Parliament. This conference replaces the existing COFACC and CODACC meeting.

### **Conclusions**

In 2012, the position of national parliaments in the European Union was bigger than expected. National parliaments step by step became an important part of the EU’s official institutional setup. Now they play a vital role in the operation of the EU. The Treaty of Lisbon strengthened the role of national parliaments and of the European Parliament, all of which could now play a more active role in the debates and initiatives aimed at deepening European integration. The Lisbon Treaty gave national parliaments the instruments for protecting the balance between the Union and member states. The national parliaments achieved their main objective of reducing the so-called ‘democratic deficit’ of the European Union (Verger, 2010). The national parliaments at home will have greater opportunities to make a direct input into EU decision-making. These parliaments, in each member state, feel empowered like never before. They are given a greater role in examining EU laws before they are passed. A new early warning system gives national parliaments the right to comment on draft laws and to ensure that the EU does not overstep its authority by involving itself in matters that can best be dealt with at national, regional or local level. National parliaments have a right to information, the way they monitor subsidiarity, mechanisms for evaluating policy in the fields of freedom, security and justice, or procedures for reforming treaties. Therefore the EU’s parliamentary system is able to ensure European norms, standards and principles. In addition, national parliaments and regional parliamentary bodies received competences in parliamentary diplomacy through the strong ties between parliaments and parliamentarians in Europe (Hajiyev, 2010).

In less than three years, national parliaments have evolved from an informative role into the most powerful consultative bodies in the system of

European integration. It is true that they do not yet speak with a forceful collective voice, nor are they using their collective fora as a means to establish or to mirror some kind of a European public opinion. Resolutions that have been passed by the inter-parliamentary conferences have not yet had big effects on European institutions or the European decision-making process, or on national parliaments themselves (Maurer, 2001, pp. 1–4). However, it is very important that the development of the powers and the position of the national parliaments is becoming a part of the ‘constitutional balance and activity’ of European institutions.

A very important factor in this development was the Polish presidency in the EU Council. The Polish Parliament played a significant role in terms of supporting and developing cooperation among the national parliaments of European countries. The Parliament was thus host to a great number of meetings and conferences where members of European countries’ parliaments were present to discuss current political matters on the agenda of the EU. The selection of inter-parliamentary meetings was made, precisely taking into consideration Poland’s program of the presidency. The role of the Polish presidency was a bridge of dialogue between the EU and member countries.

Finally, we must conclude that Polish parliamentary activity during the presidency was successfully concentrated on: (1) increasing the European system based on inter-parliamentary cooperation in Europe; (2) encouraging a constructive dialogue between member-states and EU institutions; (3) information, consultation and coordination between member countries and parliaments; (4) full support for actions combating the crisis; (5) enhancing the parliamentary dimension of the EU’s external operations.

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### Abstract

The process of European integration has contributed to a significant concentration of member states' political power in the hands of a bureaucratic-executive elite. This has been a result of European Union institutions discriminating in favor of national administrations rather than respective parliamentary institutions. Thereby, a European pattern of supremacy of the executive elite has been established, based on a mechanism of strict cooperation, and a system of institutional links between European and national bureaucracies. Unfortunately, national parliaments and the European Parliament were significantly late in responding to this process. This resulted in a lack of efficient methods to monitor political decision-makers and officials as regards their activity in the European forum. Not only has the integration system undermined the general powers of nation-states, but it has created a powerful bureaucracy whose competences have significantly increased on account of its international connections.

