

# Presidency of the Council of the European Union – knowledge and expectations in a time of uncertainty and geopolitical turbulence

**Małgorzata Molęda-Zdziech**

SGH WARSAW SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS  
E-MAIL: [MMOLED@SGH.WAW.PL](mailto:MMOLED@SGH.WAW.PL)  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5763-3058

## Abstract

On 1 January 2025, for the second time since joining the European Union in 2004, Poland assumed the six-month presidency of the Council of the EU. This event occurs every 13.5 years for a Member State, which is rare. Moreover, a new institutional cycle was beginning in the EU at the time, with the new European Parliament, following the June 2025 elections, and the new EC under the leadership of President Ursula von der Leyen, already in office for the second time. Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine, which had already lasted three years, and Donald Trump's assumption of the presidency – i.e. the threat, uncertainty and geopolitical transformation of the world order – have heightened the expectation of strong leadership. Additionally, the timing of the Polish presidency overlaps with the ongoing presidential campaign.

The aim of this article is to diagnose the state of knowledge about the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as well as expectations related to it. Does the public experience fears and anxieties, and if so, what are they related to? Can the expectations presented realistically be realised during the presidency? What is the knowledge of the EU in Poland, after 20 years of membership?

The study was conducted through the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) between 28 November and 8 December 2024 – i.e. before the official announcement of the priorities of the Polish Presidency. The research sample was a 915-person, representative, name-based random sample of adult Polish residents. A mixed-mode procedure was used (56.6% by CAPI, 26.9% by CATI, and 16.5% by CAWI).

**Key words:** Polish presidency in the European Union Council, turning presidency, geopolitical context, public opinion, security

**JEL Classification:**

## Introduction

The presidency of the EU Council, one of the three main European institutions, falls to the Member States every 13.5 years; therefore, it is an important event. For this reason, it is worth examining what we know about the challenges of the presidency, to what extent it is recognized by the public, and what expectations are attached to it. Has the 20th anniversary of Poland's accession to the European Union, which fell on 1 May 2004, strengthened the interest in the European Union? And above all, has it become embedded in the public consciousness and memory?

A multi-level approach is needed to describe the context of contemporary challenges. At the level of individual change, this is best described by the work of Zygmunt Bauman, with his concept of liquid modernity and fears. Bauman explains why societies react with fear (Bauman 2007, 2018).

At the political level, it is important to refer to Ivan Krastev, a Bulgarian sociologist who shows how fear translates into politics and how it contributes to the delegitimization of the liberal order (Krastev 2017; Krastev, Holmes 2019). In the geopolitical dimension, the changes in the security system are described with great insight in the works and analyses of Adam Rotfeld, an expert on Russia. Rotfeld explains why existing institutions are unable to stem the growing chaos and, above all, to ensure security. Institutionally, the architecture of security and international norms is disintegrating. Force rather than law starts to rule the world, and institutions (the UN, the EU) no longer provide sufficient stabilizing functions (Rotfeld 2020). Having combined the perspectives of Bauman, Krastev, and Rotfeld, we obtain a picture of the world that is: structurally unstable (Bauman 2007, 2018), politically frustrated and ideologically disappointed (Krastev 2017), institutionally defenseless (Rotfeld 2020). The result of this is:

- a growing number of hybrid conflicts,
- a resurgence of geopolitics of force,
- the power of narrative and emotion over rationality,
- the breakdown of the liberal order,
- a permanent security crisis (from Ukraine to the Indo-Pacific),
- the weakening of global institutions and norms,
- the rivalry between worldviews (liberal, authoritarian revisionists, regional powers).

The above perspectives paint a picture of the turbulent geopolitics of the 21st century: a world without stable foundations, without universal models, and without effective security mechanisms.

Poland is chairing the Council of the European Union for the second time. It first took the helm in the second half of 2011. It is interesting that, as is the case now, Donald Tusk was prime minister at the time. In the meantime, he headed the Council of the European Union, and his term was well received. This is why expectations for the Polish presidency, additionally heightened by hopes for leadership in the EU, are really high. Donald Tusk brings hope, especially when the countries and leaders that traditionally play the role of leaders, Germany and France, are mired in internal political and economic problems.

The aim of this article is to diagnose the state of knowledge about the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as well as expectations related to it. Does the public experience fears and anxieties, and if so, what are they related to? Can the expectations presented realistically be realised during the presidency? What is the knowledge of the EU in Poland, after 20 years of membership?

In this article, we refer to the results from the study conducted through the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) between 28 November and 8 December 2024 – i.e. before the official announcement of the priorities of the Polish Presidency, which took place on 10 December 2024. The research sample was a 915-person, representative, name-based random sample of adult Polish residents. A mixed-mode procedure was used (56.6% by CAPI, 26.9% by CATI, and 16.5% by CAWI).

## Do we know when Poland joined the European Union

After twenty years of Poland's membership of the EU, 49% of respondents were able to give the correct year of Poland's accession to the European Community. More than a third of respondents (36%) chose the escape answer "difficult to say". 15% of respondents gave the wrong year.

It should be noted that the 20th anniversary of Poland's accession to the EU was not officially celebrated: the government did not organise a single joint event, which, after eight years of questioning the legitimacy of being in the European community, may have further contributed to the fact that this important anniversary did not become embedded in the public memory.

Moreover, it should be emphasised that this may be the result of a lack of civic and European education. During the eight years of the right-wing government (2015-2023) – of the Law and Justice (PiS) party – the European Union was most often the object of attacks, shown only in a negative light. The topic of the European Union was almost eliminated from school curricula; the subject Knowledge of Society (WoS) was removed, and in its place, from 1 September 2022, a new subject, Historia i teraźniejszość (HiT, eng. History and the Present (HiT), was introduced to secondary schools. The textbook for this subject "Historia i teraźniejszość" was prepared by Professor Wojciech Roszkowski, a historian associated with the Law and Justice party, presenting a biased vision of history<sup>1</sup>. Many teachers opted not to use the textbook for their lessons<sup>2</sup>.

Researchers of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) stressed that the creation of HiT in place of WoS would result in 95% of secondary school students losing access to civic education. They pointed out a problem: the team of experts appointed to develop the core curriculum of the HiT subject lacked representatives of social sciences (political scientists, sociologists, lawyers), who would have ensured competent preparation of the content related to civic education.

## The knowledge that Poland will take over the presidency

All the more so, the fact that almost half of the respondents (49%) answered in the affirmative to the question "Have you heard that on 1 January, Poland will take over the six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union" can be considered a good result. Men were more likely to know about the assumption of the Presidency (56%) than women (42%). This difference can be explained by the fact that politics is customarily more often considered to be the domain of men.

The knowledge of the upcoming Polish Presidency of the EU Council depends on the age of the respondents, place of residence, education, membership of a social and professional group, and place of work. As far as age is concerned, the knowledge of the Presidency is proportional to age: in the group of the youngest respondents, the majority did not know about the event: in the age group 18-24, the percentage of 'not knowing about the Presidency' was 72%, i.e. almost three quarters of the respondents. The highest number of informed respondents was among the oldest respondents: in the group of 55-64 years (63%) and 65 years and older (66%). Residents of medium-sized cities (up to 100 000) – 57% and large cities (over 500 000) – 63% were most likely to know about the fact of the Presidency. In contrast, the higher the education level, the higher the percentage of respondents aware of the event (59% of respondents with higher education and 46% with primary and lower secondary education). To a much lesser extent, the answers obtained are influenced by factors such as income per person in the household, assessment of one's own material conditions, participation in religious practices or one's political views.

The group of respondents who had heard about Poland assuming the presidency were asked more specific questions. Among other things, we asked to name the period when Poland would hold the presidency. To the question "When will Poland hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union?"

<sup>1</sup> Plans for changes to the Polish education system were announced on 10 May 2021, as part of the presentation of the "Polish Deal" reform package. Jarosław Kaczyński, head of the Law and Justice party, argued: "Poland has to be Poland, it has to be a country deeply rooted in our tradition, a proud country moving forward" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2021).

<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the 2022/2023 school year – out of 2,336 schools surveyed – 2,089 (89%) had decided not to use Wojciech Roszkowski's textbook (see more: Demagog 2023).

– more than half (59%) answered correctly, indicating that this would be Poland's second presidency<sup>3</sup>. One in four respondents chose the escape answer "difficult to say" (26%).

## Sources of information about the Presidency

Interesting data was obtained from the question on the respondents' sources of information<sup>4</sup>. Statistically, the most common sources of information for more than half of the respondents were: TV (57%), Internet portals (18%), radio (13%), social media (e.g. X, YouTube) (7%). Press is such a source for only 1% of respondents, conversations with family, friends, neighbours – for 2%. When asked about sources, the answer "difficult to say" was rarely chosen (only 2%).

The choice of source of information depends mainly on the respondents' age, education and membership in a socio-professional group. Thus, the youngest respondents (18-24 years old) are the least likely to seek information on television. Only one in five of this group points to this medium as a source of information about the Presidency. The situation is different among older respondents: 52% of respondents in the 45-54 age group learned about the Presidency from television, 64% in the 55-64 group, while the percentage among those aged 65 and over was as high as 81%. At the same time, as expected, it should be noted that the group of 18-24 year-olds most often learned about the Presidency from social media<sup>5</sup>.

Television as a source of information is most often indicated by respondents with basic vocational education (as much as 79%). At the same time, it should be noted that in none of the other education categories does the percentage of respondents pointing to television as a source of information fall below half of the respondents. Thus, the position of television, despite the announcements of its diminishing role, holds firm. The reports of the death of this medium is certainly very premature. The role of the press is declining, with single-digit responses in all categories surveyed. Respondents strongly prefer Internet portals (Onet, WP, Interia).

More than half of respondents (55%) are convinced that "the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union will contribute to strengthening Poland's position in the Union" (definitely yes – 14% and rather yes – 41%, 55% in total). It should be noted that women more often agree with the thesis presented in the question (60%) than men (51%). The opposite opinion is expressed by one in three respondents (rather no – 25%, definitely no – 6%, total 31%). 14% of respondents chose the option "difficult to say". The opinion on strengthening Poland's position in the EU as a result of the Presidency depends on the age of the respondents: the youngest are the most optimistic and most often express this belief (67% in the 18-24 age group). On the other hand, respondents from two age groups are the least optimistic: 35-44 years and 45-54 years – 51% each.

## What Poland should focus on during its presidency

When asked what Poland should focus on most during its Presidency<sup>6</sup>, respondents most often chose the answer: "on the promotion of our country in the European Union" (this answer was chosen by one in three respondents, followed by "on good organisation and efficient management of the work of the Council of the European Union" (29%). A similar percentage indicated the second answer "on presenting their vision of the work of the European Union for the near future" (28%). 8% of respondents gave the answer "difficult to say".

<sup>3</sup> For the first time, Poland assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2011. It should be noted that the Prime Minister of the government, as now, was Donald Tusk. About the first Polish Presidency in the European Council, please see: (Nowak-Far 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The question was: "How did you find out that Poland would soon take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union? – from TV (also viewed on the Internet); – from Internet news portals (e.g. Onet, WP, Interia, etc.); – from social media, e.g. X (formerly Twitter), YouTube; – from the radio; – from press; – from conversations with family, friends, neighbours; – from other sources; – difficult to say".

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the CBOS in the cafeteria of answers among social media indicated for example only X formerly Twitter, YouTube. It seems reasonable to include TikTok as well. It is very likely that the number of indications of social media as a source of news among young people would then be even higher.

<sup>6</sup> The question was: "In your opinion, during your presidency, should Poland focus mainly on – presenting its vision of how the European Union should operate in the near future; – good organisation and efficient management of the work of the Council of the European Union; – promotion of our country; – difficult to say; – refused to answer".

We also asked about the objectives of the Presidency in various areas. As above-mentioned earlier, the survey was conducted before the official presentation of the Presidency's objectives. The thematic threads of the presidency had, however, been present earlier in the public debate.

## **Areas of tasks carried out by the European Union and their relevance/importance**

Question 4 concerned the importance of the tasks that the European Union carries out. It covered seven different areas. It read as follows: "How important do you think it is for the European Union to pursue the following objectives:

- EU co-financing of the Eastern Shield, securing the eastern border of Poland and the European Union,
- relaxing climate policy, reducing the Green Deal,
- maintaining financial support for the less developed regions of the European Union,
- action to improve the mental health of children and young people,
- working towards Ukraine's accession to the EU,
- nuclear energy development,
- improving cyber security (internet security)".

The following responses were identified by respondents as the most important to be implemented: (very important, priority and important categories are given in brackets):

- Activities to improve the mental health of children and young people – (62 and 31) 93%.
- Improving cyber security (internet security) – (48 and 40) 88%.
- EU co-financing of the East Shield, securing the eastern border of Poland and the European Union – (54 and 33) 87%.
- Maintaining financial support for the less developed regions of the European Union - (22 and 58) 80%.
- Nuclear power development – (32 and 39) 71%.
- Relaxing climate policy, reducing the Green Deal – (34 and 36) 70%.
- Action for Ukraine's entry into the EU – (9 and 27) 36%.

Below, we discuss the results obtained in more detail.

### **Action to improve the mental health of children and young people**

The very high score obtained – 93% – means people perceive this problem as a priority or important, indicates a high awareness of the scale of the problem. Only 4% of respondents rated this problem as moderately important (3%) or unimportant (1%). It should be noted that this was the only task with 0% of responses in the "not important at all" category. At the same time, the percentage of escape answers "difficult to say" was the lowest – 3%.

The percentage of female as well as male responses considering the problem as a priority or important is almost the same: for women – 94% and for men – 93%.

It should be emphasised that metric variables including gender, place of residence, education, income, participation in religious practices do not influence (or influence only to a very small extent) the differences in perception of this issue. This demonstrates an awareness of the seriousness of the problem, which is highly publicised not only in the media, but also by specialist reports (e.g. by the Supreme Audit Office<sup>7</sup>). In Poland, almost 1 million children and adolescents need the help of psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists and other specialists (Supreme Audit Office 2024).

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<sup>7</sup> The Supreme Audit Office (NIK) highlighted the inefficiency of the system (shortage of child psychiatrists) in the face of a growing problem (increase in depression, suicide attempts by minors). Suicide is the second cause of death among adolescents, and the number of suicide attempts by children and young people in Poland continues to rise. According to the Police Headquarters, at the end of 2023, compared to 2020, 150% more young people attempted to take their own lives, with the number exceeding 2.1 thousand. This means that in 2023, every day in Poland, almost 6 minors made such attempts, one of which ended in death almost every other day. Suicide prevention is one of the most important goals of the World Health Organisation., see more: (Supreme Audit Office 2024).

It is also important to emphasise the dimension of social values and the high position of children treated as a value, but also as a "rare good". We are facing a demographic crisis in Poland. In Poland, the fertility rate is one of the lowest in Europe and is falling at a very fast pace. As recently as 2017, it was 1.45, after which it started to fall. In 2023, according to official data from the Central Statistical Office, it was 1.16. In 2024, experts estimated it at 1.11. To guarantee simple replacement of generations, the fertility rate should be 2.1.

It is noteworthy that 1% considered this issue to be "not very important". In contrast, none of the respondents considered it "not important at all". The perception of this problem as a priority definitely unites the respondents. This is particularly important in the context of the very strong polarisation in Polish society. It is therefore good that, as part of the Presidency's priorities, this issue has been included as the 7th priority – under the category of health security.

### **Improving cyber security (internet security) – (48 and 40) 88%**

Respondents unanimously, overwhelmingly identify this issue as an EU priority. Neither gender, age nor place of residence affect the perception of the importance of this issue. As many as 90% of respondents with a secondary education consider improving cyber security to be a priority or important. When we look at the category of social and occupational group, the lowest percentage of respondents rating this issue as a priority or important is for unskilled workers (36% and 46%) – 82%, 6 points below the average. A similar result was obtained when political views were taken into account (left, centre, right, difficult to say). Respondents with specified views have a similar assessment of the importance of the problem, and only respondents with unspecified views ("difficult to say") – obtained a percentage below the average of 82%.

Only 8% consider this problem to be moderately important (6%) or not very important (2%). Also notable is the low percentage of "difficult to say" responses – 4%.

It should be emphasised that digital security issues are reflected in the priorities of the Polish Presidency: the third priority is resistance to foreign interference and disinformation.

### **EU co-financing of the East Shield, securing the eastern border of Poland and the European Union – (54 and 33) 87%**

The vast majority of respondents identified the issue of the East Shield as the third most important among their priorities.

It was considered not important at all by only 1% of respondents. The difference in assessment between women (85%) and men (91%) is 6 percentage points. The categories of place of residence, education and political views do not differentiate attitudes. Differences in evaluation can be seen in the case of socio-professional groups. 72% of unskilled workers consider this problem to be a priority or important, 15% below the average, and as many as 91% of respondents from professionals with higher education.

Qualifying the issue as the third most important shows an understanding of the seriousness of the situation beyond our eastern border, related to full-scale Russian aggression in Ukraine, as well as the change in the world order, following the election of US President Donald Trump.

At the same time, it is important to underline the accuracy of the indication of EU co-financing of the East Shield as a priority of the Polish Presidency – two priorities to be precise: 1. the ability to defend as well as: 2. protection of people and borders. (cf. European Council Conclusions – of 20 March 2025).

### **Maintain financial support for the less developed regions of the European Union – (22 and 58) 80%**

81% of female respondents and 79% of male respondents consider this issue to be a priority or important. Among the youngest surveyed (18-24 year-olds), 72% rated the maintenance of financial support for the less developed regions of the European Union as very important or important, and one in five respondents in this age group - as moderately important.

Participation in religious practices does not affect attitudes in this dimension. Interestingly, respondents who participate in religious practices several times a week and those who do not participate at all have the

same results, respectively: 77 and 74% for very important and important. Interestingly, out of the group of respondents participating in religious practices several times a week no one considered it not very important, not important at all, and from the group not participating in religious practices at all – only 2% did.

### **Nuclear power development – (31 and 39) 70%**

The development of nuclear energy was considered a priority overall: 31%, as important 39% One can see the difference in the assessment of women and men: 21% of women surveyed considered this issue to be a priority, while among men the percentage was more than twice as high – 43%. It was considered important by 41% of female and 38% of male respondents. In terms of age, the lowest percentage considering this issue as a priority – 22% – was obtained in the 18-24 year-old category, while the highest percentage – 39% – was obtained in the 25-35 year-old category. Noteworthy is the most senior group – 65 years and over – in which 34% consider the development of nuclear energy to be a priority. This is a higher percentage than for the younger age groups: 55-64 years and 35-44 years – 28% each.

Assessments of the importance of energy development are influenced by political views: as many as 80% of respondents identifying with the Right see this issue as a priority or important. This is 10% more than the average. Diverse views can be seen among social and professional groups. Respondents representing the following categories are least enthusiastic: homemakers and others – 10% consider it a priority. Among farmers and the unemployed, 17% each consider it a priority. The highest percentages were obtained for the categories: middle-skilled, technicians and self-employed – 42% each.

The per capita income variable has a positive impact on the assessment of this issue. As many as 43% with incomes of PLN 6 000 000 or more consider the development of nuclear power to be a priority, while only half of this number supports this in the income group up to PLN 1999 – 22%.

In terms of political views, 80% of those surveyed with right-wing views rated this issue as a priority (40%) or important (40%).

Overall, one in 10 respondents has no opinion on this issue. The highest percentage of “difficult to say” responses – of 19% – was received among pensioners.

It should be emphasised that this objective, too, fits in with the priorities of the Polish Presidency, specifically the fifth: energy transition.

### **Relaxation of climate policy, reduction of the Green Deal - (34 and 36) 70%**

Men's and women's assessments differ: men are far more likely than women to call for relaxation of climate policy and reduction of the Green Deal (41% of male respondents consider relaxation of climate policy and the reduction of the Green Deal to be a priority, while the percentage among women is 27%. It is considered as important by 42% of women and 29% of men.

Among the socio-occupational category, the most frequent proponents of relaxing climate policy and reducing the Green Deal, are farmers – 76% (of which 47% consider it a priority and 29% – important), and middle staff and technicians – 76%.

One in four of those with undecided political views chose the runaway answer “difficult to say” (24%). Income influences attitudes in this regard. Respondents with the highest incomes (PLN 6,000 and above) are the least likely to favour relaxing this policy (60%), while 76% of those with incomes between 2,000 and 2,999 support it.

This problem is partly reflected in the Polish Presidency's 6th priority: a competitive and resilient agriculture.

### **Measures for Ukraine's entry into the EU - (9 and 27) 36%**

These were indicated by respondents as the last among EU priority issues. Only 9% consider it as very important. One in four considers the issue of Ukraine's entry as moderately important (27%), the same number – as not very important or not important at all (27%). One in ten respondents chose the runaway answer “difficult to say”.

This is a result that should worry us, especially in the context of other survey results on the perception of the Ukrainians and the worsening perception of the Ukrainians in Poland. The Poles' attitudes towards the Ukrainians are changing: sympathy has decreased from 40% to 30%, dislike has increased from 30% to 38%<sup>8</sup>.

This state of affairs can be explained by the fact that in a crisis situation (and a protracted war is one) the principle of solidarity is forgotten. After the exceptionally strong grassroots support shown by the citizens themselves after Russia's aggression in Ukraine in March 2022, surveys show an increase in fear and anxiety. Poles fear that Ukraine's membership could make their situation worse. This may also be the result of disinformation about the Ukrainians taking advantage of the Polish social welfare system, disseminated by the right wing (S. Mentzen<sup>9</sup>, K. Nawrocki, G. Braun<sup>10</sup>). Unfortunately, during the presidential campaign, also the candidate of the Civic Coalition, R. Trzaskowski partially popularised this rhetoric (withdrawal of the 800 plus benefit)<sup>11</sup>. This should concern us, because as a neighbour of Ukraine, Poland should be an advocate for Ukraine and an ambassador for its membership in the EU.

The fears and concerns of various social groups are further fuelled by disinformation activities on the part of Russia, as fact checking organisations have repeatedly confirmed. The narrative towards the Ukrainians in Poland is subject to similar mechanisms as the narrative built around migrants. Moral panic mechanisms are evident. It should be noted that economic data unequivocally show higher incomes and greater benefits for the Polish economy than the costs incurred for social expenditures for them. According to the report by the Polish Economic Institute (PIE) – "Refugees from Ukraine on the Polish labour market: opportunities and obstacles" – about 65% of refugees have found jobs in Poland and the current employment rate is the highest among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Zyzik et al. 2023)<sup>12</sup>.

## Main findings of the study

After 20 years of Poland's membership in the EU, 49% of respondents are able to give the correct year of Poland's accession to the EU. More than a third of respondents (36%) chose the answer "difficult to say". 15% of respondents gave the wrong year. Men were more likely to know about the presidency (56%) than women (42%).

Every second Pole knew about the upcoming Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Statistically, this was most often a man, with a higher education, from a medium-sized or large city, from a managerial or medium-sized technical staff, with an income above PLN 6,000, and with concrete political views.

More than half (59%) of the respondents who have heard of Poland assuming the Presidency correctly indicated that this was the second time Poland had held the EU Council Presidency.

The knowledge of the upcoming Polish Presidency of the EU depends (to the greatest extent) on: the age of the respondents, their place of residence, education, membership of a social and professional group, place of work.

The sources of knowledge about the Presidency, for more than half of the respondents, were as follows: television (57%), Internet portals (18%), the radio (13%), social media (7%). The choice of the source of information depends primarily on: the age of respondents, their education, and membership of a socio-professional group. The youngest respondents (18–24 years old) use television the least frequently, with only one in five of this group indicating this medium as a source of information about the Presidency, while among 65-year-olds and over, the percentage reaches 81%. 18–24-year-olds use social media most often

<sup>8</sup> Cf. (CBOS 2025a).

<sup>9</sup> The Confederate candidate tried to hide the previously promoted so-called Confederate Five: "We don't want Jews, homosexuals, abortion, taxes and the European Union". These were the words first uttered by Sławomir Mentzen in Krakow, 25 March 2019. See more: (Konkretnie 2023). In the candidate's programme, the official website of presidential candidate Sławomir Mentzen (<https://mentzen2025.pl/>), we no longer find references to it. Instead, he opposes sending Polish troops to Ukraine.

<sup>10</sup> The slogan "Down with the Ukrainianisation of Poland!".

<sup>11</sup> Cf. (CBOS 2025b).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also: (CBOS 2025d,e).

More than half of respondents are convinced that “the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union will contribute to strengthening Poland’s position in the Union” (definitely yes – 14% and rather yes – 41%, total 55%). Women are more likely to agree with the thesis presented in the question (60%) than men – 51%.

Studies most often indicate that during its presidency, Poland should focus above all “on promoting our country in the European Union”. This is the opinion of one in three respondents (33%). It should be emphasised that the proper role of the state in the presidency – “focusing on good organisation and efficient management of the work of the Council of the European Union” – is indicated by 29% of respondents. Almost the same percentage of respondents believes that Poland should “present its vision of the EU’s activities for the nearest future” (28%).

Respondents identified the following as the most important to be implemented (very important, priority and important responses combined): activities to improve the mental health of children and young people – 93%, improving cyber security (internet security) – 88%, EU co-financing of the East Shield, securing the eastern border of Poland and the European Union – 87%, maintaining financial support for the less developed regions of the European Union – 80%, development of nuclear energy – 70%, relaxation of climate policy, reduction of the Green Deal – 70%, action for Ukraine’s accession to the EU – 36%.

From the above indications, it can be seen that most of the problems identified as priority and important were among the priorities of the Polish Presidency.

The results of the survey give rise to recommendations for action in selected areas. **The most important challenge is European education, or citizenship education.** After 20 years of Poland’s membership in the EU, we should think of European education as being embedded in civic education. Poland should not be separated from the European Union, treating the community as a distant entity. Poland is in the EU and it has an active role in it, due to its potential, economic achievements, and systemic transformation. It can be a model and an inspiration for countries aspiring to join the EU.

**The second problem is how to communicate about European affairs in a responsible, reliable and effective way.** The six-month period of the Presidency should be used to hold a serious discussion about the European Union, in which Poland plays an important role: it is an active, causative subject, and not a helpless object which submits to the actions of EU decision-makers. The time of the presidency is an optimal opportunity not only to raise awareness of the activities of the institutions, the decision-making process, and the successes and achievements, but also to explain what cannot be done. Responsible communication is important, as is the use of language that reaches out to each of the social groups. The choice of the right medium is an important element of communication. As can be seen from the survey, in Poland television is still an important source of information about politics.

Countering Russian disinformation that builds negative and false narratives about Ukraine and the Ukrainians, among others, is extremely important. In the context of the challenges of Poland’s presidency of the Council of the EU, it is important to build Poland’s role as an ambassador for Ukraine. It is worrying to see the build-up of ‘moral panic’ towards the Ukrainians, just like towards immigrants. This creates a sense of threat and fear that does not serve understanding. Messages aimed at rapid, unreflective dissemination, often based on Russian disinformation, are dangerous weapons and damage good communication and mutual understanding between our neighbours. The time of the presidency is an optimal time for a debate on Ukraine’s future in the EU. Unfortunately, the timing of the political campaign - conducted in connection with the presidential elections - has further fuelled negative sentiment towards the Ukrainians.

**Action to improve the mental health of children and young people was shown as a priority.** The unanimity in indicating this issue as a priority objective of the EU is somewhat worrying. Indeed, the issue of health protection is not a common EU policy, but remains the responsibility of nation states. Nevertheless, there are many programmes aimed at taking preventive, educational measures that are worth promoting. In view of the demographic collapse in Poland and the very low fertility rate, the issue assumes additional importance.

**In the context of security and a hybrid war, improving cyber security (internet security) has gained significance.** The digitalisation of many areas of the economy as well as a range of activities in

everyday life, raises the question of how to (effectively) secure users while maintaining access for all citizens, without excluding any groups. The awareness of the importance of this problem, as shown by the survey results, is an evidence of the challenge we face. The institutions of the state must find an answer to it.

## The assessment of the presidency

The assessment of the presidency is primarily influenced by the political orientation and party affiliations of the respondents (CBOS 2025c). Respondents who identify themselves as left-wing and centrist rate the presidency and its results more positively than those with right-wing views. The Civic Coalition electorate rates the presidency the highest – 54% of this group believe that the presidency was active, and 46% believe that it achieved a lot. As many as 67% believe that Poland has increased its influence on EU politics. The most enthusiastic assessment, with as many as 80%, was given to the improvement of Poland's image as a result of the actions and events during the presidency. As for critical assessments, they were expressed primarily by the electorate of Law and Justice and the Confederation. According to them, Poland was not active enough, achieved little, and did not even gain in terms of image.

## Conclusions

According to A. Nowak-Far (2011), Poland's assumption of the presidency of the European Union can be seen as a test of the efficiency of its public administration and the maturity of its elites, particularly the political elite. Similarly, in the case of the second Polish presidency, administrative efficiency and the maturity of the political elite were important. Furthermore, another challenge for the Presidency should be to ensure that decisions are evidence-based (Toneva-Metodieva 2020).

Strengthening one's political position, demonstrating leadership skills, and promoting one's country are further results that a well-run presidency can bring (Vandecasteele, Bossuyt 2014). This is because the geopolitical context in which the European Union found itself changed dramatically: Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine, as well as the transition to a "transactional policy" in international relations after Donald Trump took office as President of the United States. Disinformation, both from Russia and China, is a major challenge. The international order is changing (Giles 2016; Krastev 2017; Krastev, Holmes 2019). There is an ongoing struggle to impose the new rules, with Russia fighting to maintain its position as an empire. Despite this unfavorable and volatile context, the vast majority of the Presidency's declared goals were achieved (Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2025).

The motto "Security, Europe" fit well with Europe's priority challenges. The goals related to restoring security were taken over by the Danish presidency. Denmark is holding the rotating presidency of the Council for the eighth time, this time as part of a presidency trio with Poland and Cyprus. The Danish presidency works for a secure Europe as well as a competitive and green Europe which was reflected in the adopted slogan: "A strong Europe in a changing world" (Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2025).

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