

Poland's Cautious EU Approach Is Intended to Reassure Doubters

I am not quite sure what to think of Minister Cimoszewicz's remarks in his recent article in *European Affairs*. He thoughtfully examines his understanding of the kind of European Union that Poland hopes to join; an EU faithful to its functional nature that will further integrate incrementally, while continuing to assure peace and stability in Europe.

But it would seem that the Minister is not just providing official views on the fundamentals such as the principle of subsidiarity (according to which decisions are to be taken at the most appropriate level, whether local, national or EU-wide), but is also setting out markers from Poland's perspective about what is desirable and acceptable in an evolving EU structure.

One presumes that the Minister's cautious approach – looking for existing and potential safeguards against too much central power in the EU structure – is intended for domestic constituencies concerned about, and not yet convinced of, the full benefits of EU membership.

Each prospective EU member has had to give this factor serious thought. Poland is the largest economic entity among those seek-

ing to be part of the present enlargement phase. It brings a number of significant issues to the negotiating table, in particular agriculture, and the national government needs as much negotiating room to maneuver as possible.

Minister Cimoszewicz shows that he has given serious, constructive thought to the EU framework, and has also sent a clear signal that Poland intends to play an active role in affecting the outcome of discussions about the future nature of the European Union.

Emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity, references to the notion of federation and suggestions as to possible new mechanisms offer glimpses not only of the Polish government's approach to Brussels but also of how it hopes to develop sufficient support for membership among its citizens.

The Minister does not say so, but one can imagine that, having emerged from so many years of a different kind of regional "integration," and barely ten years into an, at times, uncertain economic and political transformation process, Poland and other central European candidates for EU membership have a very different set of interests and sensitivities from the existing members.

But I can't help but think that what the Minister gives with the one hand he takes with the other. He suggests that the European Union simplify its four treaties, that it create a constitution-type treaty to include a legally binding charter of fundamental rights, and that it strengthen the role of the European Council.

But these efforts to streamline the system and strengthen its organic aspects are then burdened with the suggested creation of a Legislative Council (to give national parliaments a greater role) and the creation of a committee of national deputies in the European Parliament to safeguard subsidiarity.

This North American reader must conclude that despite the Minister's comments to the contrary he is actually favoring a kind of incremental federalism for the European Union. He is partial to this formulation but for political reasons sees it as something "in the distant future."

As one senior and respected American politician once noted, "all politics are local." Minister Cimoszewicz's thoughtful remarks have underscored that truism whether or not he intended to do so.

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