

Poland's EU Council presidency: Rearmament, police-state measures and a war economy

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On January 1, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk took over the rotating six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union. Above all, this role involves the organisational preparation of the council meetings. However, it also gives the council president the opportunity to set certain thematic priorities.

Tusk made clear from the outset what is central for him: the EU must be prepared for war. Under the motto “Security, Europe!” he presented a militarist and authoritarian agenda in Warsaw. By this he meant not only the arming of the state and its powers at home and abroad, but in all areas of society, which he linked to the buzzwords “information, economy, energy, food and health.”

In other words, in view of the “tense situation” in which Europe finds itself, all areas of society must be adapted to the demands of war. “If Europe is powerless, it will not survive,” said Tusk.

He made clear how far his considerations go with the following sentence: “The sources of Europe’s greatness—freedom, a sense of sovereignty and our culture—are all worth the effort. Some say that they are even worth the ultimate sacrifice.”

In view of the numerous crimes committed by the major European powers, from colonialism to the Holocaust, conjuring up a pan-European myth of “greatness” is already abhorrent enough.

But much more disturbing is the question: what is the “ultimate sacrifice” for Tusk? The renewed death of millions of soldiers on the battlefields and millions more civilians, as in the past world wars? A systematic mass murder of civilians, as in the Gaza Strip? The annihilation of all major European cities in a nuclear exchange? Or even the annihilation of all humanity as a result of a nuclear winter?

When Tusk raises these questions, he does so not as an individual, or even as the Polish head of government, but as the voice of European imperialism. As a long-standing president of the European Council, he is well connected in

the EU. His words show how far the debates among the European elites have already proceeded. The NATO states are increasingly escalating the proxy war in Ukraine, and at least since French President Emmanuel Macron’s statements last year, it has also become clear that the deployment of ground troops in Ukraine is being intensively debated.

Tusk’s agenda is also a reaction to the imminent return of Donald Trump to the White House. During his first presidency, Trump had already intensified the trade war against his European NATO allies. Now, even before taking office, he has made it clear that he will not stop there. By calling for US control of Greenland, which is under Danish sovereignty, he has shown his willingness to create military facts against other NATO states as well.

For the Polish elite, whether in the PiS or Tusk camp, the historical alliance with US imperialism is a given. Defence Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz promptly supported Trump’s demand to increase military spending to 5 percent of gross domestic product and offered himself as a “transatlantic link.”

But Poland’s economic ties with Europe are much stronger than with the US. Around 30 percent of Poland’s foreign trade is with Germany, followed by the Czech Republic and France (each around 6 percent), while the US accounts for just 3 percent. This contradiction will inevitably intensify in the new Trump era.

Tusk, who clearly represents the faction in Poland’s ruling class that favours cooperation with Berlin, Brussels and Paris, has therefore repeatedly emphasised the need for European unity.

Last year, for example, under Tusk, Poland joined the European Air Defence System (European Sky Shield Initiative) initiated by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in 2022. At the same time, in May, Tusk, together with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, criticised the lack of a unified European air defence shield. So far, neither France nor Italy nor Spain are participating in the European system.

A clear diplomatic affront was the non-invitation of Poland to the war summit of Scholz and US President Joe Biden in October in Berlin, to which the British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and the French President Emmanuel Macron were invited, but not Tusk. The Warsaw correspondent of broadcaster Deutsche Welle therefore warned that Poland, “disappointed in Germany,” had reoriented itself around the Scandinavian-Baltic bloc.

In a pseudo-philosophical digression, Tusk also proclaimed in his speech that “strength and unity produce wisdom, even in the face of suffering,” leaving no doubt that he wanted to ensure more suffering. He wants to escalate the war against refugees—or the “protection of people and borders,” as he cynically called it.

Tusk, who is often presented as a liberal alternative to the far-right PiS, as well as the Hungarian government of Viktor Orbán, not only seamlessly continues their attacks on refugees, but intensifies them.

On December 18, the Polish government, with the blessing of the EU, passed a package of laws that effectively abolish the right to asylum in Poland. The Council of Ministers can now suspend the right to asylum in designated areas for 60 days. The PiS had already acted in a similar way but had declared a state of emergency to do so, thereby also eliminating the rights of journalists and refugee workers. Under Tusk, the exception is now being made the legal rule.

Although the new law pays some lip service to vulnerable people, with pregnant women already among the victims of illegal push-backs, this is not worth the paper it is written on.

In addition, asylum protection that has already been granted can now be withdrawn if the person concerned has been convicted of serious crimes or supposedly “poses a threat to national security.”

The latter is directed in particular against the millions of Ukrainians who have fled to Poland. While they initially received comparatively extensive and unbureaucratic help, almost all state aid has now been discontinued. Instead, agitation against them is increasing, from openly fascist groups warning of the “Ukrainisation of Poland” to Defence Minister Kosiniak-Kamysz, who denounces them as “draft dodgers.” Kosiniak-Kamysz has declared his willingness to cooperate with Kiev in registering Ukrainian conscripts, so they can be sent to the front.

In the face of recurring crimes by Polish soldiers on the border, Kosiniak-Kamysz has set up a special unit of his own to provide legal assistance to the soldiers. He had previously described as “unacceptable” the arrest of soldiers who had fired warning shots at refugees in spring 2024.

The regular reports of drunken soldiers, violence against refugees and other offences continued seamlessly into the new year. On New Year’s Day, a drunken border guard shot

at a civilian car near the border town of Mielnik.

The Orwellian narrative depicting fleeing people as a danger runs like a red thread through the entire far-right agenda. As early as May 2024, the Polish government had already justified the multibillion-dollar “East Shield” project by citing the “hybrid war” that Russia and Belarus were allegedly waging by “exploiting” asylum-seeking refugees.

The Tusk government is not satisfied with the 100-kilometre-long, five-metre-high fence that the previous PiS government had erected. It wants to expand the existing death strip, which is visually comparable to the former border fortifications of the “Iron Curtain,” to include extensive military positions. It is obvious that these installations stand to serve a war with Russia, which is why Warsaw has asked its European allies to contribute to the costs.

Poland is not alone in this. In Finland, Spain and Greece, the EU’s external border is also guarded by the military. The attacks on refugees are only the tip of a general assault on democratic rights. This is shown by the attacks on journalists and refugee workers in the border area. At the same time, the unrestrained attitudes of a fascist soldiery are being cultivated among border officials.

Under Tusk, social and intra-European tensions will inevitably increase; Trump’s policies will serve as a catalyst. The European Commission is discussing plans to raise around €500 billion for armaments over the next 10 years, in addition to increasing national spending.

This money will inevitably be squeezed out of the European working class. Cuts in social spending, job cuts and wage reductions will explosively intensify the class struggle. Those in power will not hesitate to agitate the *soldateska* (backward, unscrupulous soldiers) against their own working class. The only thing they agree on is to secure the largest possible share in the imperialist redivision of the world and to defend their privileges by force against the working class.



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