

## YOUR MEETING WITH POLAND'S LEADERSHIP IN PRAGUE

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is likely to be both President Lech Kaczynski and Prime Minister Donald Tusk) is much anticipated in Warsaw. If you meet with them together, which I expect to be the case, it will be the first time these two political rivals have met jointly with a foreign head of state, and the fact that they are even thinking about putting aside their animosities shows how important this meeting is to both gentlemen. Tusk's strong numbers after 16 months in office are virtually unprecedented in post-Communist Polish history (support for Kaczynski hovers around 25 percent, compared with 50 percent for Tusk). Despite all this, I expect they will present a united, cordial front in pressing for stronger strategic cooperation between Poland and the United States. Both will be eager to hear your views on Missile Defense, Russia, and Afghanistan. They will also try to gauge your awareness of EU (and their own) efforts -- through a program called the "Eastern Partnership" -- to draw countries like Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus closer to Western institutions. Kaczynski especially may feel duty-bound to push you on Poland's exclusion from the Visa Waiver Program, although Tusk has said he is tired of raising it with the U.S. Finally, a gentle push from you on the long-unresolved issue of private property compensation would help to generate forward momentum.

meeting comes out of the heels of the G20 Summit. Poland's financial system has survived the global crisis relatively unscathed, but it suffers from weakness in its European trade and investment partners. Poland will see some growth this year, albeit barely in the positive range, despite rising unemployment. Tusk is not pursuing significant economic stimulus, but is working to draw on EU funds that were part of Poland's accession process, at a rate of roughly EUR 10 billion/year for 7 years. He can't/won't borrow his way out, and believes that fiscal prudence is shielding Poland the financial market downturn. Stimulus aside, Tusk is in tune with other U.S. goals at the London Summit like restraining protectionism, increasing the IMF's resources, and revisiting euro adoption procedures.

first and foremost on both leaders' minds. Last August, Tusk agreed to the Ballistic Missile Defense Agreement (BMDA) for three reasons: 1) we asked; 2) saying no was potentially much more problematic than saying yes; and 3) with the U.S. agreement to deploy a rotating battery of Patriots to Poland, Tusk could credibly argue that BMDA on net increased Polish security. While waiting for a decision on Missile Defense, the Poles are also pressing for implementation of our bilateral Strategic Declaration of Cooperation, issued side-by-side with BMDA last summer. The Declaration operates separately from the BMDA and promises U.S. defense modernization aid, a high-level Strategic Dialogue and a Patriot battery rotation starting in 2009 (contingent on ratification of a Supplemental Status of Forces Agreement). The Patriot rotation puts U.S. boots on Polish soil, something Poles think will inherently improve their security situation. The Strategic Dialogue is also important to Tusk, who like many here suspect Eastern Europe has fallen off the U.S. radar.

U.S. decision not to pursue Missile Defense, if taken to satisfy Russia, would negatively impact bilateral relations. Both leaders confront prevalent public concern that the U.S. might sacrifice Missile Defense (or Polish-U.S. relations) on the altar of improved relations with Moscow. For deep-seeded historical reasons, Russian posturing on issues surrounding Missile Defense carries much greater weight in Poland than concerns about the Iranian nuclear threat. If the U.S. decides not to pursue Missile Defense, Poles will be disappointed if it appears the decision was made either over their heads or at Russia's behest.

(c) On Russia, in general, Tusk has taken a non-confrontational but constructive tack, in contrast to Kaczynski's emotional approach. Tusk's views in many ways mirror our own. He recognizes the need for dialogue with Russia, not just to advance common interests, but also to work through difficult issues. That said, Tusk will be the first to insist that the EU and NATO press Russia to play by the rules and uphold its earlier commitments, especially on Georgia and on energy security. Kaczynski, on the other hand, has long been skeptical of other EU Member States' and

-- more recently -- U.S. efforts to improve relations with Russia.

Russia, they will try to gauge your awareness of the Polish-Swedish Eastern Partnership initiative, which seeks to draw countries on Europe's eastern border, especially Ukraine and Georgia, closer to Western institutions. At Warsaw's urging, and in the shadow of the Georgia crisis, the EU accelerated work on the initiative and committed EUR 600 million (approximately USD 814 million) in assistance to Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and possibly Belarus. By offering former Soviet republics the prospect of free trade and visa-free travel to the EU, the Eastern Partnership aims to spur reforms needed for eventual

7. (C) Beyond sensitivities over Missile Defense, there is still widespread public concern that Polish contributions in Iraq (2003-2008) and Afghanistan (ongoing) are under-appreciated by America. Although defense spending has been cut because of financial crisis-related shortfalls in tax revenues, Poland's commitment to Afghanistan remains steady. Poland currently has 1600 soldiers in Afghanistan and recently assumed sole military responsibility for Ghazni province. A further plus up of 400 troops is coming. On the downside, Poland remains uncertain about how it will manage

8. (C) Poland's ongoing exclusion from the Visa Waiver Program grates badly. This issue is raised in every town I visit, and resentment among the population persistently undermines our strategic relationship. Kaczynski in particular may ask if you see a way forward with the new Congress. Unfortunately, fallout from the economic crisis will likely reduce the number of qualified Polish applicants and make it even more difficult for Poland to qualify in the short term, under the current program guidelines.

raised hopes that his government would act quickly to address the long-unresolved issue of compensation for World War II and Communist-era private property confiscations. Tusk's failure to submit legislation to parliament by the end of 2008 -- along with his government's virtual silence since then -- has raised concerns about foot-dragging. Government officials privately insist the legislation is in the final stages of government clearance and will be submitted to parliament in the near future. A quiet reminder would help generate forward momentum, as would an offer (perhaps in a

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