



## The Change of UN Security Council Members in 2019 and the Significance for Poland

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*Of the five non-permanent members who will join the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2019, particular activity may be expected from Germany, which would like to be seen as representing the interests of the EU, and South Africa, which seeks greater influence of African states and international organisations on UN activities on the continent. The presence of both Germany and France on the Council will provide Poland with an opportunity to revive tripartite cooperation.*

**Aspirations of New Members.** On 8 June, five UN members were elected to non-permanent seats on the UNSC. Their two-year terms start on 1 January 2019.<sup>1</sup> Of the new members, the highest activity can be expected from Germany. Statements by then Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel in January and current FM Heiko Maas in March indicate that Germany views threats to multilateralism and free trade posed by major powers such as Russia and the U.S. under President Donald Trump as creating the need for a stronger commitment to defending the current global order. German activity in the UNSC also will be prompted by its awareness of its limited ability to lead with military power and its ambition to obtain a permanent seat on the UNSC, demonstrated over the years. As the fourth-largest contributor to the UN and peacekeeping operations budgets and the second-largest donor of humanitarian and development aid in 2017, Germany believes it has strong arguments to demand greater impact on the functioning of the UN.

The objectives of South Africa, which in the UNSC election campaign focused on its region, similar to the much smaller Dominican Republic, are more modest than Germany's. According to data from the U.S. Department of State, in 2017, South Africa was among the 10 countries with the lowest voting coincidence with the U.S. in the UN General Assembly, at 18% (for comparison, Poland's was 54%). Therefore, one can expect friction between the U.S. and South Africa at the UNSC. The Dominican Republic is different in this regard. In running for the seat on the Council, it sought support from the U.S. and China in particular because its previous efforts to get a seat failed without their support. This explains the Dominican Republic's support for a resolution condemning the electoral process in Venezuela adopted by the Organization of American States in May 2018 and strongly supported by the U.S., and its rupture of official relations with the authorities in Taiwan, maintained since the 1940s, and the establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations with China. During its term, the Dominican Republic will try to avoid confrontation with either country.

The other two newly elected members of the UNSC, Belgium and Indonesia, focused mainly on global problems in their campaign. Belgium usually coordinates its activities at the UN forum with other EU countries. Still, Indonesia usually supports developing countries in the voting, which may bring it into

<sup>1</sup>For more about the UNSC elections, see: S. Zaręba, "Elections of New Non-Permanent Members of the UN Security Council," PISM Spotlight, No. 40/2018, 9 June 2018.

conflict with the U.S. and some members of the EU on issues such as disarmament, which generally meet the topic with scepticism.

**Dividing Lines.** For Poland, a close ally of the U.S., it is important to identify potential points of disagreement between the new members of the UNSC and the U.S. in the main issues on the Council's agenda. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict will surely be a bone of contention. All the new members support a solution that provides for the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel and excludes the possibility of a unilateral settlement of the status of Jerusalem by Israel. Tensions may arise particularly with Indonesia, which pointed to the Palestinian issue as one of its main priorities in the UNSC, as well as South Africa, which withdrew its ambassador from Israel in protest of the deaths of dozens of Palestinian protesters at the hands of Israeli troops in mid-May 2018. Another possible source of divergence between the U.S. and some new members, mostly Germany, Belgium, and South Africa, will be the approach to multilateralism. The latter group is critical of the emerging barriers to global trade, including the tariffs announced by President Trump, and of the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement, the nuclear deal with Iran, and the UN Human Rights Council, among others.

In several other matters, the dividing line will run between the new members of the UNSC and the U.S. and EU countries, which is why it is important to Poland as a member of the Union. This is particularly true of South Africa's calls to increase the role of regional organisations in conflict management in Africa and to give African countries more influence over the setup and operation of peacekeeping missions in Africa. One can also expect reluctance to the proposal to let more African states become penholders of draft resolutions on conflicts in Africa. During South Africa's last term on the Council, France agreed to cooperate with South Africa in drafting resolutions concerning the Democratic Republic of Congo if South Africa was elected to the Council. However, it is doubtful that it will make similar concessions regarding Burundi or the Central African Republic, or that the U.S. will agree to that concerning Liberia and South Sudan. South Africa, heavily criticized by the countries of the region for supporting Resolution 1973 authorizing the use of armed force in Libya by Western countries in 2011, will also be likely to oppose external armed intervention in Syria and other countries. Together with the Dominican Republic and Indonesia, it likely will support a total ban on nuclear weapons, which the U.S. and the EU countries will not accept, regarding it as unrealistic from both a political and military point of view.

There is no clarity as to the positions of the new members regarding the crises in Ukraine or the Korean Peninsula. Both topics were clearly avoided during the campaign.

**Shared Points.** The views of the new UNSC members are broadly consistent with respect to such issues as the fight against climate change and support for the Paris climate agreement, the promotion of sustainable development, improvement of the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions, and the protection of children and women in armed conflicts. All of them also believe that to prevent global problems such as armed conflict, terrorism, and migration, it is necessary to take action at the source, including the fight against poverty and social inequality. Poland, which raised some of these problems during its presidency of the UNSC in May 2018, can count on cooperation with the new members on these matters.

In the election campaign, two countries also advocated the need for ensuring respect for international law on a global scale, which is a basic priority of Poland's membership in the UNSC. Belgium insisted on ensuring compliance with the standards of human rights and international humanitarian law and increasing the accountability of perpetrators of international crimes. South Africa, on the other hand, emphasised its support of the UN Charter as the foundation of the international system and the key role of the UNSC in ensuring international peace and security. Poland can count on cooperation with both countries in this area.

**Perspectives.** Germany's joining the UNSC will almost coincide with the UK leaving the European Union. This will give Germany the opportunity to promote itself as a country representing EU interests on the Council. Lacking a veto, which prevents the adoption of resolutions unfavourable to a given member or group, Germany will be forced to cooperate with France, the only member of the UNSC both in the EU and holding a veto. An intensification of Franco-German cooperation is thus likely.

This situation could be beneficial for Poland if it is able to influence the EU's international agenda. Given that all UNSC resolutions, even those concerning procedural matters, require nine votes to be adopted, initiatives by Germany and France will need the support of other members of the Council. Poland seems to be a natural partner for them in such areas as the fight against climate change, cybersecurity, or combating the causes of conflict at the source.

The cooperation between all three countries could be developed within the revived Weimar Triangle format. The re-activation of this forum could also be helpful in fulfilling other objectives of Polish foreign policy. However, Poland must weigh any initiative against U.S. policy because the Trump administration tracks voting in international organisations much more than his predecessors. Therefore, it would be advisable for Poland to signal to its partners in advance if there are any individual issues that, if requiring a vote, may compel it to abstain due to its security interests linked with the U.S.