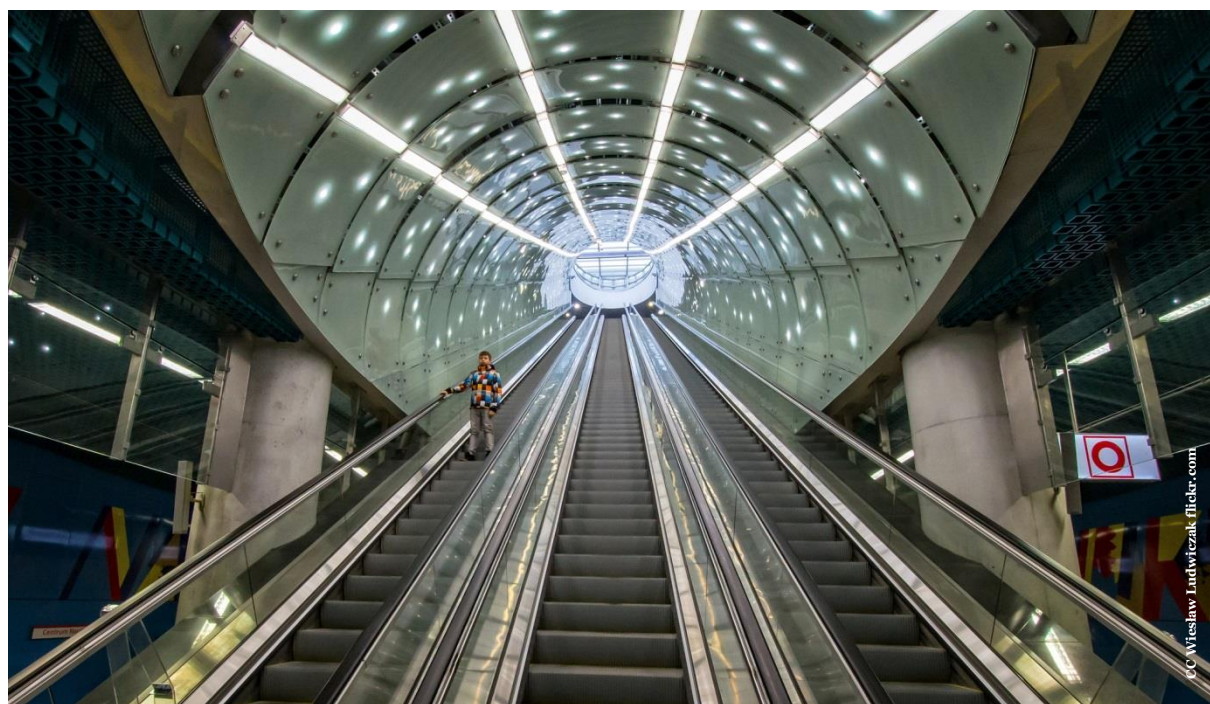


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# A forward-looking agenda for Poland and Germany in Europe

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*Major risks in international politics force Poland and Germany to work together. This could be an opportunity to transform the relationship from confrontation towards cooperative assertiveness. This policy paper proposes a method to achieve this goal, centred around a forward-looking agenda with prioritized items. The capitals should tackle the most urgent and controversial issues head-on while generating goodwill through progress on urgent but less controversial items.*

# 1 Good vibes in bad times

Recent events in the Polish-German relationship were dominated by distrust. Warsaw's conflict with the European Commission over the rule of law, disagreements on refugee policy and diverging views on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline were some of the clouds which arose on the horizon.

However, major risks in international politics start bringing the capitals together. The durability of the European Union is being challenged by growing anti-EU sentiments and the fallout of Brexit. The security environment is under siege because of Russia's aggressive foreign policy. The transatlantic partnership, a bedrock of post-war international order, is being questioned under the presidency of Donald Trump, potentially implying a weakening of NATO, trade wars and regional instability.

This international environment forces Warsaw and Berlin to close ranks and shift focus on commonalities. In this context, Angela Merkel's visit to Warsaw on February 7<sup>th</sup> can be seen as a cautious opening in bilateral relations. The Chancellor met Poland's top decision-makers, including Jarosław Kaczyński. Reform of the European Union was the main topic of discussions.

In Polish media, the event "[sparked](#) an interest unmatched by any international event in Poland in recent years". The conservative weekly "Wprost" [depicted](#) Angela Merkel and Jarosław Kaczyński hugging each other under the heading "a marriage of convenience". The conservative daily newspaper "Rzeczpospolita" [encouraged](#) both governments "to undertake activities aiming to renew the partnership between our countries", while the left-leaning "Krytyka Polityczna" [argued](#) that Poland has no choice than to "find an arrangement" with Germany. Also German commentators [underscored](#) Warsaw's changing tone, especially Kaczyński's support for Merkel in the upcoming German elections.

The impact of the visit should not be overrated. Given the extent of divisions between the governments a one-off show of good vibes is not sufficient to produce lasting improvements in the relationship.

However, the cautious opening could be used to start a debate on how to transform Polish-German cooperation. This debate could centre on two questions:

- How can we move from the current mode of distrust into a mode of cooperation in which differences do not damage foundations of the relationship?
- How can we move from declarations to tangible projects benefiting both partners?

In this policy paper I address these two questions. First, I suggest a method for prioritizing issues on the bilateral agenda in a way which could lead to cooperative assertiveness in Polish-German relations (Chapter 2). This refers to a mode of relations combining conflict management with the willingness to sustain fundamentals of the relationship.

Secondly, I propose a set of issues to be put on the Polish-German agenda in the short to medium term (Chapters 3-4). This non-exhaustive set serves as an illustration of how the Polish-German agenda could be filled with concrete projects.

A final chapter summarizes the paper and suggests some practical steps towards setting the bilateral agenda in motion.

## 2 Towards cooperative assertiveness

Polish-German relations should follow the principle of cooperative assertiveness. Disagreements on details of policy must be identified and articulated, but differences on individual issues should not stand in the way of realizing shared overarching interests.

To this end, legal foundations of cooperation (the [Treaty of Good Neighbourhood and Friendly Cooperation](#) of 1991), programmatic declarations (e.g. of the [Bundestag](#) and the two [governments](#), 2011) and on-going projects should be streamlined into a common agenda structured along three principles: comprehensiveness, compartmentalization and prioritization.

First, all important issues must get on the drawing table instead of remaining in the dark and damaging the relationship. **Comprehensiveness** requires both capitals to formulate a list of important topics, keep the list up-to-date and synchronize it between Berlin and Warsaw.

Secondly, failure in dealing with one issue should not spill over into other issues. If the partner seemingly does not deliver on an issue, this should not be an excuse to refuse cooperation in other areas. Therefore agenda issues should be **compartmentalized**, treated as stand-alone items.

Third, issues should be assigned different levels of priority. Given limited resources it is important to **prioritize** issues that are most relevant for the relationship. This is a dynamic process: issues which are high on the agenda today can be low on the agenda tomorrow, and vice versa.

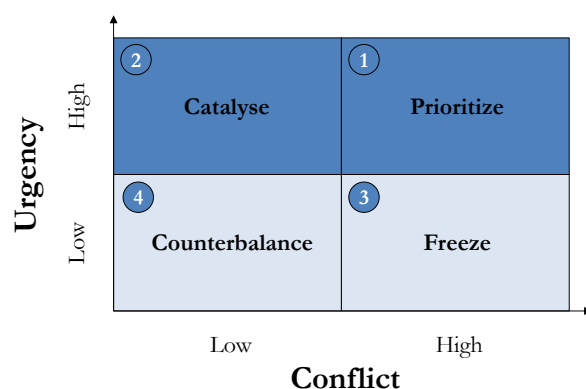
While prioritization can be carried out in different ways, in the current environment of international instability items could be prioritized on two dimensions: urgency and conflict.

1. **Urgency** signifies to what extent an issue is time-critical given international threats and must therefore be resolved before other issues.
2. **Conflict** refers to the distance between ideal points of the two partners on a given issue. The larger the distance, the higher the conflict.

Plotting these dimensions against each other yields four groups of issues (see Figure 1).

**The main focus of bilateral cooperation should be on quadrants 1 and 2.** Issues in quadrant 1 (high urgency, high conflict) are time critical in the sense that inaction will soon increase the scale of the problem. They also cause a high degree of conflict which damages the relationship. Therefore these issues should be **prioritized**, i.e. assigned maximum resources and a commitment to produce solutions as soon as possible.

Priority items, elaborated in Chapter 3, include questions of aligning alliance policies, synchronizing bilateral threat perceptions and making the best of flexible integration.



**Figure 1.**

Solving urgent and conflictual issues will be difficult as it might involve zero-sum bargaining and painful compromises. Therefore it should be flanked by cooperation on items which are urgent but cause a low degree of conflict (quadrant 2). This is the area where goodwill sustaining the relationship can be generated. Work on these items reassures Polish and German counterparts that, despite major conflicts, cooperation yields value to both countries. Issues in this quadrant should be used to **catalyse** solutions in more difficult areas.

Items in this area include joint projects on economic innovation, energy policy and the support for Ukraine. Chapter 4 offers a detailed discussion.

**In contrast, issues in quadrants 3 and 4 merit less political attention.** The third quadrant captures items which are highly conflictual but not urgent. These items consume significant energy and goodwill without making important contributions to the bilateral problem-solving capacity. To free up space for more pressing problems, they should be **frozen** and addressed at a later stage – or, if possible, dropped from the agenda.

Issues to be frozen for the time being might include [conflicts](#) over German media operating in Poland, the [legal status](#) of the Polish minority in Germany and [accusations](#) of German historic revisionism. These issues are discussed at length elsewhere and will not be elaborated in this paper.

Finally, the fourth quadrant contains items which are neither conflictual nor urgent. These projects don't relate directly to current international challenges and hence merit less political attention than priority issues in quadrants 1 and 2. However, they allow to **counterbalance** a difficult political relationship on the national level by improved relations in other areas. The more difficult national-level cooperation gets, the more resources for counterbalancing projects might be needed.

Items in this category include, for example, city partnerships, borderland and inter-regional cooperation, youth exchanges, funding for Polish-German civil society projects, language training, exchange programmes for journalists, 'young leaders' programmes as well as scientific and cultural cooperation. These projects form the bedrock of traditional Polish-German cooperation and do not require additional description.

After this 'bird-eye view' of the agenda let us move to a more detailed description of how the agenda could be filled with content – starting, in the next chapter, with urgent and conflictual priority issues.



## 3 Priority issues

The background of the current opening in bilateral relations is a set of major risks in international politics which pose a challenge for both countries. Both countries are endangered by a looming disintegration of the EU due to the fallout of Brexit and growing anti-EU sentiments. Both countries are challenged by Russia's aggressive foreign policy, and by potential consequences of Donald Trump's transactional approach to diplomacy: weakening of NATO, United Nations and the EU, trade wars, regional instability.

**Leaders of both countries share the perception that these threats exist and agree to some extent on how to tackle them.** For instance, both capitals recognize that in the current political environment bold calls for 'more Europe' are not the answer. Instead, a functional approach is needed: as much integration as necessary to make European policies work, but as little as possible. On Russia, both governments propose reacting to the annexation of Crimea and war against Ukraine through a combination of sanctions, strengthening NATO's Eastern flank and supporting countries destabilized by Moscow. Berlin and Warsaw also see eye-to-eye on some responses to Donald Trump's foreign policy, e.g. the need to increase defence spending.

**Moreover, Berlin and Warsaw realize that they need each other to address these issues.** On one hand, the Polish government realizes that its policy of strengthening alliances in European politics with the UK (which leaves the Union) and Visegrad countries (which have limited bargaining power and cohesion of views) while distancing itself from Berlin and Paris increases the risk of isolation at a time where major decisions on European integration are on the horizon, not to speak of dangers posed by Russia and a reoriented American foreign policy. On the other hand, Germany needs Polish support on any reform of the European Union and on orchestrating joint European responses to international political challenges. Berlin must involve Warsaw to keep the Union together.

Although these international threats require urgent responses, agreeing on specifics of such responses will be difficult given three conflictual items in the bilateral relationship: alliance policy, diverging threat perceptions and diverging approaches to flexible integration.

### 3.1 The risk of bowling alone

First, Poland and Germany diverge in their alliance policy. This could make it more difficult to build unity of the EU in upcoming high-stakes negotiations with the UK, United States and Russia.

**Before the current 'pivot to Germany' (the depth and durability of which has yet to be validated), Poland has openly distanced itself from Berlin while betting on alternative alliances.** In his first [foreign policy address](#) (January 2016), Foreign Minister Waszczykowski announced that, in Europe, Poland will work "in first order" with the United Kingdom. He underscored attachment to the Visegrad Group while criticizing relations with Germany as characterized by "superficial conciliation". The Minister also felt uneasy about the fact that „60 percent of [Poland's] [trade] turnover is with EU markets", which he interprets as risky overdependence on a single economic area. To counter it, he proposed closer ties with China, including in the '16+1' format where Central and Eastern European countries negotiate directly with Beijing, mostly on infrastructure investments and economic cooperation.

In security policy, the Polish government has been concerned about Germany's relations with Russia. In February 2015, Waszczykowski [argued](#) that „Russia and Germany are conducting above our heads a kind of a concert of powers”. The leader of the Law and Justice party, Jarosław Kaczyński, [spoke](#) of a “German-Russian condominium” threatening Poland. As a result, Poland has tried to strengthen its relations with the United States. Moreover, Warsaw [advocates](#) ‘intermarium’, a security alliance of countries between the Black and Baltic Seas.

In line with this policy, President Andrzej Duda [invited](#) Donald Trump to a summit of the Three Seas Initiative (an initiative of countries between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas) in Wrocław in June 2017. At the same time the government [cancelled](#) a multi-billion euro deal to buy military helicopters from Airbus, which was a project of the Weimar Triangle to deepen integration of Europe's defence industries.

**Germany's alliance policy also contains pivots excluding Poland.** Warsaw registered with disappointment that Berlin's immediate reaction to Brexit in June 2016 was to organize a [summit](#) of EU's founding members which excluded ‘new’ member states. Germany also has a history of pre-agreeing European policies at Franco-German meetings, such as in [Deauville](#) in 2010 (summit on Treaty changes in reaction to the Eurozone crisis) and further on in the sovereign debt crisis. Crucially, Berlin's relations with Russia include projects that are not coordinated with Poland, and sometimes pursued in opposition to Polish positions. This applies particularly to the field of energy (North Stream gas pipelines) but also defence. A deal to supply the Russian army with a cutting-edge infantry training system produced by Rheinmetall was [signed](#) in 2011 and [cancelled](#) at the last moment in 2014 as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Looking ahead, Warsaw will closely watch [splits](#) on Russia policy inside the German establishment. Whereas the CDU/CSU and Greens largely support sanctions as a reaction to the annexation of Crimea and war against Ukraine, parts of the SPD, as well as Die Linke, AfD, business organisations (Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft), pro-Russian lobbies (Deutsch-Russisches Forum) and some prime ministers of federal states (Saxony, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Bavaria) demand to scrap sanctions and return to business as usual.

**Unfortunately, the more Poland and Germany look for alternative alliances, the easier it is to divide and rule Europe at a time where unity is needed.** In sanction policy, the unity of Europe is its greatest asset. However, positive sentiments of parts of Germany's establishment towards Russia can and will be exploited by Moscow to lift the sanction regime and prevent collective responses of the EU and NATO. In Brexit negotiations, the United Kingdom could try to weaken the unity of the EU by proposing ‘sweeteners’ to individual member states. The same applies to potential upcoming negotiations with the United States, e.g. on trade restrictions imposed by the Trump administration on imported European goods.

That's why Warsaw and Berlin should establish a reflex of investing in the Polish-German alliance before resorting to other options. In the coming months, public statements and practical decisions of Polish and German decision-makers will reveal to what extent there is interest to do so.

## 3.2 It's not my problem

Secondly, the capitals diverge on threat perceptions. Problems perceived by the other partner as highly dangerous are sometimes discarded and opposition to helping the partner sets in. This affects negatively Poland's and Germany's capacity to solve problems and be influential in European politics.

**In Poland, an influential theory proposes that the country has limited responsibility to help member states in need because they did not show solidarity to Poland in the past.** Polish officials sometimes [interpret](#) the country's EU membership as a chain of events in which their country was treated unfairly. To end this chain, they propose a "Poland first" approach, whereby helping others runs against the national interest.

This approach should be reassessed, as it limits Poland's influence in the medium and long term. The flipside of downplaying other member states' threat perceptions is that those member states will have fewer reasons to support Poland when it needs help itself. "Poland first" invites a future "France first", "Germany first" and other "firsts". Given the turbulent international environment, supporting others can therefore be seen as insurance policy against upcoming threats.

Moreover, reacting to other member states' problems secures public support for European integration. As Mareike Kleine shows, helping member states with issues they perceive as salient in return for receiving help in the future has been the key mechanism preventing the EU from disintegrating due to domestic resistance, from the 1957 Treaty of Rome till today<sup>1</sup>. Thus, when Poland strictly ignores threat perceptions of other member states, it risks damaging the support for the European project across the member states. Since support is in short supply already, this is a dangerous strategy.

**The "not my problem" approach is not only a Polish issue, though.** Germany, for its part, has sometimes questioned Polish threat perceptions originating in the East. Although Berlin's current policy towards Russia largely converges with Polish positions, the insistence on building the North Stream 2 gas pipeline despite fierce [resistance](#) from Poland, Ukraine, Baltic and Visegrad countries is [perceived](#) as an example of unilateralism incompatible with calls on Warsaw to show more solidarity.

This perception of German unilateralism will likely increase if pro-Russian positions become stronger in future governments. The German establishment should take into account that playing down Polish threat perceptions will make it harder to win Warsaw's support in addressing international challenges.

**As a principle, Warsaw and Berlin should take the other's threat perceptions seriously and help each other whenever such need arises.** It should be noted that 'help' can mean different things and be designed in a way which is palatable to both partners. For instance, in the case of the refugee crisis a reluctance to take in larger numbers of refugees could have been compensated with substantial investments in improving the humanitarian situation in the Middle East, contributions to securing EU's borders and some, at least symbolic, burden-sharing regarding refugee relocation. Such an approach would earn Poland credit which could be capitalized when Warsaw is in need.

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<sup>1</sup> For an elaboration please see Kleine, Mareike (2013). *Informal Governance in the European Union: How Governments Make International Organizations Work*. Cornell University Press.

### 3.3 Fifty shades of flexibility

Thirdly, Poland and Germany should find a common approach to flexible integration. Poland should decide if it wants to be ‘in’ our ‘out’ of flexibility projects – and Germany should find ways of keeping the doors open and incentivizing Poland to join.

Poland is sending mixed signals on this issue. Polish leaders have usually warned about a “two-speed Europe” as an approach which could marginalize Poland. During a press conference of Prime Minister Szydło and Chancellor Merkel on February 7<sup>th</sup>, the former [took](#) a surprisingly mild position: “I just said that it’s important for Poland that (...) member states of the EU have the feeling and awareness that they are all treated equally and that we are building unity within Europe” [author’s translation]. However, a day later Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the governing party, contradicted this statement by [saying](#) that “there can’t be a two-speed Europe”.

**The Polish government should make up its mind on this question and, after deciding, take appropriate action.** Being outside of the Eurozone diminishes Polish influence. First, because the Eurozone has own decision-making bodies from which non-members are physically excluded (Eurogroup, Euro Summit and Eurogroup Working Group)<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, because during and after the euro crisis the agenda of these bodies has drifted from technical Eurozone-specific issues towards issues concerning all EU members<sup>3</sup>.

As a result, Poland literally does not sit at a table which decides on more and more items concerning its own interests. To illustrate, Rebecca Adler-Nissen argues in her recent study of the Eurogroup that “the group now issues specific advice on labour market reform, product market reform and financial markets. Moreover, it debates overarching macroeconomic policy, international economic and energy policy. Even climate and environmental issues are discussed in the Eurogroup” (2014: 96). These are issues are clearly important for Poland.

Additional projects of flexible integration will diminish Polish influence even further. Under [discussion](#) is a deeper integration of the Eurozone, where considered elements include a separate budget, finance minister, voting arrangement in the European Parliament and some mechanism of fiscal transfers. Also in the area of defence and migration policy integration among all EU member reached its limits and might be pursued among groups of member states.

Those member states who participate in all or many projects, such as Germany, will have disproportionate control over European policies. Staying out is an option, but the price would be a scenario where Warsaw would have to accept more and more policies which it cannot influence. This would strengthen the image of the EU as a foreign power which illegitimately interferes in domestic politics. A process of disillusionment and loosening ties with the Union would set in. As Piotr Buras [argues](#), Poland would not leave the EU, but the EU would leave Poland.

In this context Poland would do well to start an honest debate about Eurozone membership and benefits of European integration in general. This will not be easy. As a [study](#) of the Batory Foundation shows, the image of Poles as strong supporters of European integration should be qualified. While it is true that about 80% of Poles support EU membership in Eurobarometer

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed elaboration on how non-members are excluded from Eurozone bodies, see Adler-Nissen, Rebecca (2014). *Opting Out of the European Union: Diplomacy, Sovereignty and European Integration*, Cambridge University Press, p. 74-113.

<sup>3</sup> See Ondarza, N. v., Bowen, D. A. (2013). [Strengthening the core or splitting Europe? Prospects and pitfalls of a strategy of differentiated integration](#). SWP Research Paper: RP 2/2013. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.



polls, support for additional integration in areas discussed in the flexibility debate (such as monetary integration, migration, defence) is extremely low<sup>4</sup>.

Good news is that these views are at least partially a product of the way European integration has been presented by Polish political parties. Therefore such views can be changed. A starting point could be to focus the debate on ‘nominal’ versus ‘real’ sovereignty. In which areas should national sovereignty be shared with other member states in order to solve problems important for the Polish people?

**Germany, for its part, can play an important role in designing flexibility projects in a way which increases the incentives and decreases the barriers for Poland to join.**

The governance of flexibility can take different forms and be more or less inclusive. For instance, countries which opt out from the area of Justice and Home Affairs are allowed to participate (without a right to vote) in the decision-making process, and can even decide to opt in with full voting rights if they wish. De facto, this [means](#) that they have significant influence on policymaking in an area from which they formally opted out<sup>5</sup>.

This inclusive approach contrasts with governance arrangements of the Eurozone, where members have exclusive, separate bodies. However, even in this area compromises are possible. Non-members of the Eurozone which ratify the Fiscal Compact are allowed to participate in Euro Summits when they deal with issues of relevance for all EU member states. Also in the area of the Banking Union compromise solutions were found: non-members of the Eurozone can establish ‘close cooperation’ on banking supervision between the ECB and the national competent authority whereby the ECB can make non-binding recommendations and cooperation can be terminated anytime by both sides<sup>6</sup>.

In sum, there is scope for innovative mechanisms of involving non-member states in flexibility projects. Germany should be at the forefront of such innovative thinking and help Poland to be included as much as possible in European-level decision-making. Poland, in turn, should more carefully consider the potential benefits of joining flexibility projects.

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<sup>4</sup> Just 9% of the Polish population [supports](#) further integration, while 38% would like to see less of it. 65% [refuse](#) joining the Eurozone and also 65% are of the isolationist [opinion](#) that Poland “should deal with its own problems and let other nations fend for themselves as best they can”. On the crucially important issue of migration and asylum, since Autumn 2015 an average of two thirds of Poles has been [against](#) receiving refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Nearly 60% of Poles [see](#) immigrants from Muslim countries as a terrorist danger, and 60% [perceive](#) foreigners in general as a threat.

<sup>5</sup> This is elaborated in detail by Adler-Nissen, Rebecca (2014). *Opting Out of the European Union: Diplomacy, Sovereignty and European Integration*, Cambridge University Press, p. 114-146.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of legal innovations on involving ‘outs’ in flexibility projects, see Craig, Paul P. and Markakis, Menelaos [The Euro Area, its Regulation and Impact on Non-Euro Member States](#) (March 2, 2016). Forthcoming in P Koutrakos and J Snell (eds), *Research Handbook on the Law of the EU’s Internal Market* (Edward Elgar, 2016); Oxford Legal Studies Research Paper No. 11/2016.

## 4 Catalysts

The three issues outlined in the previous chapter are ‘big ticket items’: urgent, conflictual and politically costly as they require compromises and course-corrections. To generate support for solutions on such items, leaders in both countries could identify urgent projects where the degree of conflict is relatively low (second quadrant, Figure 2).

In the following I suggest some policy areas in which these projects could be created (if they do not exist) or strengthened (if they do exist).

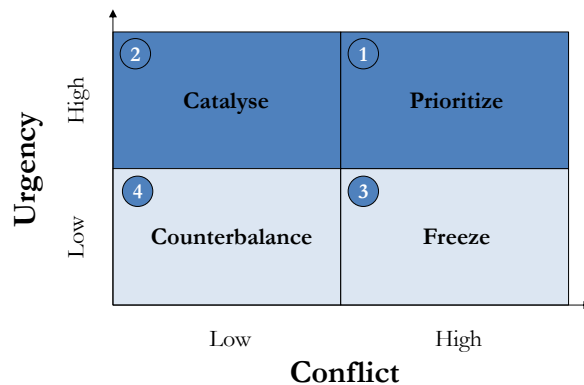


Figure 2.

### 4.1 Innovation

First, a big priority for the Polish government is to improve the **innovativeness** of Polish firms. The Minister for Development has recently presented the “[Morawiecki plan](#)”, a strategy to avoid a “middle income trap” of the economy by decreasing reliance on foreign capital and shifting the production portfolio of Polish firms from low added-value assembly to high value-added production. Any projects which contribute to these goals and generate value also for the German side would be welcome.

For instance, Poland and Germany could set up a pipeline of [joint projects](#) financed by the European Fund for Strategic Investments, targeting measures to improve innovativeness. A bilateral innovation dialogue could be kicked off, bringing together representatives of Polish and German ministries responsible for research and economy as well as representatives of firms and relevant associations. Similarly, a joint project on connecting and strengthening start-up environments in Poland and Germany could be initiated. Franco-German [cooperation](#) in these areas could serve as inspiration.

Moreover, the portfolio of existing Polish-German projects in the area of research, education and economic cooperation could be comprehensively reviewed by a joint commission and a set of most promising projects from the innovation perspective could receive additional funding.

### 4.2 Energy

Secondly, **energy** – seen in Poland often from a security lens – is not only a divisive area, but also one with scope for cooperation. Kai-Olaf Lang from the think tank Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, together with Polish and German colleagues, [identifies](#) a stream of projects where interests of both capitals converge. This includes bilateral cooperation on ‘soft infrastructure’ and strategic investments.

Soft infrastructure includes upcoming regulations on gas and electricity trading, the European Emissions Trading System, post-2020 European energy governance package and security of

supply regulations. Strategic investments refers to joint projects in areas of e-mobility, prosumption, energy efficiency, joint renewable projects and biogas.

A Polish-German Energy Council could be set up to coordinate the implementation of such initiatives and identify disagreements in the field of energy policy at an early stage.

## 4.3 Ukraine

Third, both countries agree on the need to support **Ukraine** as a country seriously affected by Russia's aggression. Besides cooperation on big questions (e.g. financial and technical [support](#) of the EU and IMF for Ukraine's reform process), a range of tangible smaller projects could be considered. For instance, as Kai-Olaf Lang [suggests](#), Poland and Germany could kick off bilateral 'implementation partnerships' helping Ukrainian reformers to speed up implementation of reforms.

Another idea, [suggested](#) by Weronika Priesmeyer-Tkocz and Bartosz Rydliński is to set up a University of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). This project could reflect Polish-German experiences of the European University Viadrina and Polish-Ukrainian experiences of the University of Lublin. The University could bring together students from the EU and the EaP as well as manage a study programme where EaP students would learn about different regions of the EU through academic exchanges.

## 5 Conclusion

The recent visit of Chancellor Angela Merkel in Warsaw has fuelled expectations of a new opening in Polish-German relations. In the end, both partners seem to acknowledge the need to cooperate on solving major international challenges, from the fallout of Brexit through the reform of the EU to Washington's new foreign policy.

However, a single visit will not change relations on its own, especially given their previous state and on-going conflicts, such as Poland's strife with the European Commission. What is needed is a method and process for gradually transforming Polish-German relations from a mode of confrontation into one of cooperative assertiveness underpinned by tangible projects.

In this policy paper I drew the contours of a forward-looking bilateral agenda with two types of priority issues:

1. Those which are **highly urgent** and **highly controversial**. This includes e.g. the question of aligning alliance policies, synchronizing bilateral threat perceptions and making the best of flexible integration.
2. Those which are **highly urgent** but **less controversial**, e.g. projects on economic innovation, elements of energy policy and support for Ukraine.

The assumption of this approach is that achieving tangible results on urgent, but less controversial items will produce the goodwill required to solve some of the major controversies. In other words, success on easier issues will 'oil' negotiations on difficult items.

The following three steps could help setting the agenda in motion.

First, the proposed method is a thought experiment requiring further refinement rather than an off-the-shelf policy plan. Future work could improve its analytical foundations and provide a more complete set of agenda items. This could be a task for analysts of Polish and German think tanks and academic institutions, collaborating during conferences and research projects along a systematic work programme. This work could be closely tied to on-going planning at relevant Polish and German governmental cells, including the Foreign Ministries, Chancelleries and Presidential Administrations.

Secondly, Polish-German relations would benefit from a fair way of registering concessions of both partners. Problem-solving can be positive-sum, but the most challenging issues are often zero-sum and require difficult compromises. However, no partner should feel discriminated by making more concessions than the other over the long term. Tracking compromise in a fair way could be the task of independent third parties, such as analytical institutions and non-governmental organizations. For instance through a periodic review of Polish-German problem-solving carried out by Polish and German experts.

Finally, constructive cooperation – especially if it involves compromises – requires public support in both Poland and Germany. Both sides should therefore strive for a balanced communication approach which publicizes both problematic issues and cases of successful problem resolution. In order to achieve this goal, one could think about a regular format bringing together Polish and German journalists (from national and regional newspapers, blogs and online portals, TV and radio) with decision-makers working on the common agenda. The

purpose of such meetings would be to provide full information about current, upcoming and recently finished projects.

In sum, the quality of the Polish-German relationship will be determined less by declarations and more by concrete projects providing value to both countries. The turbulent international environment demonstrates to both capitals the need to work together. This could be an opportunity to elevate relations to a next level.