

“This Time It’s Different:” A Note from the Guest Editors

This special issue of the *Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, exploring the political landscape after the May 2014 elections, draws on discussions held between think tanks of the European Policy Institutes Network in Warsaw on 25 November 2013. The seminar, co-organised by EPIN members: the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), assessed the likely changes to the integration process after 2014 and the role of the next Parliament in shaping post-crisis Europe. In other words, it confronted the European Parliament’s own campaign claim: “this time it’s different.”

And, indeed, everyone concurred that it was, to a degree. The participants agreed that the financial crisis has brought Europe to the forefront of national debates, something which could boost rates of voter turnout which have declined ever since the introduction of direct elections in 1979. Yet, they were less united about whether the momentum could be properly exploited by the mainstream political parties. There is growing opposition to the obligations of EU membership, let alone towards any further transfer of competences to the EU level. In some domestic debates the electoral campaign is also likely to be strongly affected by in/out arguments.

So, are clouds gathering over the new European Parliament? As Göran von Sydow argues in his contribution to this volume, the sovereign debt crisis dispensed with any residual notion of the permissive consensus in EU affairs. Thus any further transfer of powers impinging on member states’ core sovereignty is likely to further politicise EU affairs, leading to splits between mainstream parties keen to behave responsibly and newer parties disinterested by government. He argues that since the European Union has not yet developed a proper political arena to accommodate this phenomenon, the member states are the place where politicisation will take place.

For this reason, the analysis of the political mood in France, Germany and the UK by Brendan Donnelly, Almut Möller and Renaud Thillaye is timely. These three country studies provide one part of the jigsaw puzzle further elaborated by Jacek Saryusz-Wolski MEP and Valentin Kreilinger, who present their ideas about how to narrow the gap between national and European politics and thus to boost the democratic legitimacy of EU action in the next EU legislative cycle. Finally, in the last contribution to this volume Agata Gostyńska sketches relationship and balance of power between the Parliament, the European Commission and the member states' governments.

The editors of the Polish Quarterly of International Affairs would like to express their gratitude to all the contributors to this volume, as well as to the participants of the November seminar hosted by PISM for inspiring a vivid debate, whose results are herein presented.