

# BULLETIN

No. 17 (234) • February 17, 2011 • © PISM

Editors: Marcin Zaborowski (Editor-in-Chief), Agnieszka Kopeć (Executive Editor),  
Łukasz Adamski, Beata Górka-Winter, Artur Gradziuk, Leszek Jesień,  
Beata Wojna, Ernest Wyciszkievicz

---

## Germany in the UN Security Council

Ryszarda Formuszewicz

*During its two-year term in the Security Council, Germany will seek to strengthen its chances to obtain a permanent seat on the UN body. It wants—together with other countries aspiring to membership—to show that the extension of permanent members will not reduce the effectiveness of the body. Furthermore, Germany's direct involvement in the work of the UNSC is also significant for domestic policy reasons: It enables the federal government to justify better its policy towards Afghanistan.*

Since 1 January 2011, Germany has sat as a non-permanent member on the Security Council (UNSC). In voting in the General Assembly (UNGA) 12 October 2010, Germany's application received the required two thirds of the vote in the first round. While on the UNSC, Germany has taken over coordination of the policy on Afghanistan and assumed the chair of The Al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee of the Security Council. Moreover, it chairs the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

During its term, Germany intends to achieve two important goals. First of all, it will seek to obtain the greatest possible participation in the decision-making concerning international security as well as to enhance its own prestige. The final fulfilment of these aspirations would be, in particular, to obtain in the future a permanent membership on the UNSC. The German government also will try to make the most of its participation in UNSC work to increase domestic support for international engagement, including the military dimension.

**Security Council's Policy on Afghanistan.** Dealing with the Afghanistan dossier is a German priority in the UNSC. It will, in particular, lead the negotiations at the expert level with regard to the resolutions concerning the UNAMA and ISAF missions. Furthermore, assuming the chair of the Security Council's Al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee Germany gained one more tool in its efforts to work out a political solution for Afghanistan. Germany announced efforts to increase policy coherence towards Afghanistan. The importance of this is also stressed by the intention to hold a conference at the end of the year in Bonn in connection with the decade of agreements on the democratization of Afghanistan.

Taking over the coordination of the Security Council's work on Afghanistan, the German government won an important argument in the debate being carried out in Germany. Direct involvement in international policy-making concerning Afghanistan will help decision-makers increase their legitimacy in domestic politics. The German political class is confronted by the negative attitude of the majority of society to the Bundeswehr's engagement in Afghanistan. As part of ISAF, Germany sent the third-largest number of soldiers—after the U.S. and Great Britain. In response to society's expectations, the Bundeswehr ISAF mission mandate, which on 28 January was extended for one year by the Bundestag, for the first time sets the starting point to withdraw troops. The announced reduction of German forces in late 2011, however, will depend on an assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. The German government, therefore, is vitally interested in the progress of stabilization in that country and the transfer of the responsibility for security to Afghan authorities.

**Germany and the Reform of the UNSC.** The bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC is part of Germany's efforts to obtain an international position, which in its view adequately corresponds to the potential of the unified state. By becoming a permanent member of the UNSC, Germany would rise to the elite group of powers. It would both gain more prestige and increase the capacity to meet

its own interests. Symbolically, permanent membership would release Germany from the stigma of being an “enemy state,” according to the original terminology of the UN Charter.

The scale of Germany’s involvement in the financing of the UN system should be considered a strong argument in favour of promotion—in 2008-2009, its financial contribution amounted to more than €2 billion. German payments for obligatory contributions represented 8.6% of the total generated, which puts them in third after the U.S. (22%) and Japan (16.6%) and ahead of the other permanent members of the UNSC (UK 6.6%, France 6.3%, China 2.7% and Russia 1.2%). On the one hand, Germany’s bid is also justified by its activity in preventing and resolving international crises, extensive development cooperation as well as a multilateral approach to dealing with international problems, which is characteristic of Germany’s foreign policy. On the other hand, Germany’s rise to permanent membership would be controversial in terms of geographical distribution criteria—Europeans already have two permanent and three non-permanent seats in a body that currently has just fifteen members.

Germany’s efforts for membership were initiated in 1992. Germany submitted a concrete proposal for reform of the UNSC in 2005, along with Brazil, India and Japan (the Group of Four, or G4). It provided for the extension of the UNSC by six permanent and four non-permanent members. In the first category, the additional seats were assigned to Africa and Asia (two seats each), the regional group “Western Europe and Others” (one), and South America with the Caribbean (one). New non-permanent seats were destined for Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and South America with the Caribbean. As an attempt to reduce the resistance of the five current permanent members, a decision about veto powers for new members was postponed until the Review Conference 15 years after the entry into force of the amendments. The G4 proposal and its subsequent modifications, as well as other competing projects, did not gain enough support because of a rivalry among the potential beneficiaries, conflicting interests of member states and the attitude of the permanent UNSC members, who are interested in maintaining their privileged statuses.

Furthermore, German politicians consistently declare their support for granting the EU a permanent seat on the UNSC. These statements are, however, essentially maintaining the image of a pro-integration state since the prospects for realization of this bid are slight. The EU at the UN has only observer status, and most members of the UN are not willing to allow the EU to be treated on preferential terms. It became apparent in 2010 when an unsuccessful attempt was made to obtain certain preferences for the EU at the UNGA. Furthermore, the bid for an EU permanent membership would directly affect the interests of France and Great Britain, whose memberships would be questioned if there were a serious discussion of this option. At the same time, other EU Member States are opposed to Germany’s permanent membership, especially Italy. The EU Council has not agreed to a common position on UNSC reform.

**Outlook.** Germany’s expectations as to the current non-permanent membership of the UNSC will be reflected in intensive activity in the work of that body. In particular, Germany will seek to strengthen and substantiate its postulate for a permanent seat. However, the prospect for change in the composition of the UNSC is that it is unlikely, although, in 2011 the pressure to break the impasse will probably be higher due to the strong representation of emerging powers among the non-permanent members (Brazil, India, South Africa and Nigeria). G4 foreign ministers declared after a meeting on 11 February 2011 that they will push to achieve a concrete outcome during the current session of the UNGA. The current configuration of the UNSC can be treated as a test for the operability of that body after its potential extension. Because of the economic and financial crisis, one can expect the UNSC permanent members to have a more open attitude to changes as long as they would be able to reduce their own financial contributions to the organization.

Stronger pressure for reform of the UNSC will support German aspirations. However, a possible break in the deadlock on reform may not automatically lead to a favourable settlement for Germany. The essential character of the UNSC means interim or gradual solutions have the best perspective for realisation. Germany probably will be flexible and consider every option that would narrow—even in the long-term—its goal to achieve permanent membership. Germany’s readiness for flexibility has been indicated by its acceptance of “test periods” and the postponement of the decision concerning veto rights in the proposal as presented.

One can expect a substantial commitment of Germany to SC activity because of the possibility for the minister of foreign affairs to make his political mark. Already, the election of Germany to non-permanent membership was itself treated as a success by Guido Westerwelle. Prestigious participation in SC work can be used by the politically weakened foreign minister to strengthen his position in the ruling coalition, as well as in his own party, with the current support oscillating around the 5% mark needed to guarantee seats in the German Bundestag.