

Analysis of the Results of Recent Elections to the National Assembly in Poland and Its Implications for the Foreign Policy of Poland

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Introduction

After eight years in power in Poland, the conservative and nationalist right-wing party “Prawo i Sprawiedliwość” (Law&Justice) party was defeated by the united opposition “Koalicja Obywatelska” (Civic Coalition), according to [results](#) of the legislative elections which took place in mid-October 2023.

The democratic, centrist, and pro-European opposition united around Donald Tusk, claimed [victory](#) in the parliamentary elections. Donald Tusk was already Prime Minister of Poland from 2007 to 2014, Donald Tusk's Citizens' Coalition and its two allied parties (“Trzecia droga” -the Third Way¹- and “Lewica”, the Left) won [248](#) of the 460 seats in the Sejm, the Polish Parliament, or 17 more members of the Polish Parliament than the absolute majority.

Background of the issue

The election put an end to eight years of the government of the populist-nationalist Law and Justice party of Jaroslaw Kaczynski, with its Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant discourse. The results show that the ruling conservative nationalist party PiS [leads the elections](#) but without a majority with thirty-five percent, while the Citizens' Coalition of Donald Tusk, the Third Way party and the Left together obtain more by fifty-four percent.

With approximately one-third of the vote, PiS remains the leading party in Poland, but loses its absolute majority in the Sejm (198 seats). PiS will have difficulty finding an ally to govern. The 14 seats of the party Konfederacja (far-right, anti-immigration, anti-system, nationalist, radically libertarian party) with which the PiS could have formed a coalition, scored much lower than expected and narrowly passed the threshold for entry. In addition, Konfederacja and the PiS leaders repeated throughout the campaign that an alliance was not possible.

This highly anticipated election is being described as a “turning point”. Poles massively went to the polls. [The participation was 74%](#), a record since the first free elections in 1989, just after the fall of the communist regime. Faced with such mobilization, the legitimacy of this decisive vote for Poland and Europe cannot be questioned.

In eight years, PiS has undertaken a radical transformation of the Polish society. It has put the judiciary under surveillance through a reform that jeopardizes the independence of judges, including the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court. This reform angers the European Union which cut off supplies to Poland. [60 billion euros](#) of Poland's recovery and resilience plan (KPO - Krajowy Plan Odbudowy i Zwiększania Odporności) are currently blocked. This is an amount that Poland needs as it has welcomed more than [a million Ukrainian refugees](#) and is in the process of modernizing its army.

¹ This coalition was created by centrist “Polska 2050” (Poland 2050) and PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe - the agrarian Polish People's Party), which leads this center-right Polish Coalition.

[“We will remain members of the EU,”](#) Jaroslaw Kaczynski assured throughout the campaign, “but on our terms. We have already ceded part of our decision-making power to the European Union. That's enough. We want a Europe made up of sovereign states. » A barely veiled response to the former president of the European Commission who continued to accuse the PiS of leading the country to its “ruin” and exit from the European Union. However, [90% of Poles say they are attached to the EU.](#) Among the other measures introduced by the PiS: control of the media and public television, the right to abortion which has become the most restrictive in Europe, the ostracism of LGBT, the blocking of borders upon the arrival of migrants with the erection of [a barbed wire](#) wall along the border with Belarus.

A referendum on immigration took also place alongside the legislative elections but it failed. The Poles were asked to vote on “the compulsory distribution mechanism for asylum seekers provided by the European bureaucracy”. Only 40% of voters answered the question in the voting booth. The opposition boycotted it. [One more failure](#) for the PiS which hoped to mobilize the undecided thanks to the very divisive theme of immigration.

The background

Donald Tusk promised to restore the rule of law, legalize abortion, and find an agreement regarding the KPO with the EU. He will have also to unite the three opposition parties with divergent views and face the attacks of the PiS, which has no intention of giving up its ambitions, even on the opposition benches. [President Andrzej Duda risks blocking Donald Tusk's projects with his veto.](#)

Poland today remains a country split in two. On the one hand, a large part of the Polish population was retained by the social measures introduced by the PiS: lowering of the retirement age to 65 for men and 60 for women, creation in 2016 of a family allowance of [500 zlotys](#) (around 110 euros) per child which was to be increased to 800 zlotys in 2024 to cope with inflation, the promise of free highways. PiS remains a very popular party among retired people, in the eastern part of Poland, in small towns.

The country remains divided, and 43% of citizens voted for right-wing and far-right parties. The PiS lost because its image as the party of prosperity and stability disintegrated. Many voters who had voted for it for material reasons turned their backs on it. But the majority vote of the people is above all opposed to polarization, hatred, and the abuse of power.

The Polish democrats have achieved something that no one has yet achieved, [not in Hungary](#), not in Turkey, not in Serbia. They defeated, in a recognized unfair battle, an all-powerful government that had gained so many advantages in recent years that it seemed virtually impossible to defeat. This is the most important message of this election, and it goes far beyond Poland's borders: the rise of right-wing, anti-European populism that we are witnessing across Europe can be stopped.

And that strength was enormous. 74.25% of Poles went to the polls, an unprecedented figure. 53.5% of voters (around 11 million) gave a clear mandate to the Liberal Civic Coalition, the liberal-conservative Third Way, and the Left to re-establish the rule of law and put Poland [back on a pro-European path.](#)

In November 2023, the Polish president Andrzej Duda decided that the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki would be the first to attempt to form a government after the nationalist Law and Justice party won last month's elections, [the Polish president said](#) on Monday, although PiS no longer has a majority in parliament. An alliance of pro-European opposition parties led by Civic Coalition leader Donald Tusk, on the other hand, has a majority and has said it is ready to govern. If Mateusz Morawiecki is unable to secure a vote of confidence in parliament, the chamber will appoint another prime minister. [Later the treatise feeling would come back again.](#)

Implications for the foreign policy of Poland

The impact of the elections on Polish foreign policy can be analyzed from the perspective of Poland's foreign partners. The election result was greeted with relief by Poland's allies.

As far as European policy is concerned, relations between Warsaw and Brussels can only improve. Donald Tusk is a former European civil servant who has no doubts about Europe's ability to federate. The victory of the Civic Coalition should usher Poland into a new era of understanding and stability with the European authorities.

As far as policy with the United States is concerned, the Law&Justice party has sought to maintain good relations with Washington, despite American criticism of Polish institutions. Washington remains a key partner because of its major involvement in the construction of nuclear power stations in Poland. As far as relations with Russia are concerned, Tusk's views are not far removed from those of the Law&Justice party. Russia remains a country that threatens Poland's existence if Moscow's governing forces do not change. An improvement in relations with Russia requires an end to the conflict with Ukraine and Russian capitulation, as well as the establishment of a real and effective democracy within Moscow's decision-making institutions.

Finally, relations with South Korea deserve mention, as Seoul has become Warsaw's leading Asian economic partner. As of 2023, more than [six hundred South Korean companies](#) have already invested in Poland, and more than sixty Polish companies are active in the South Korean market. Of the top ten investments in terms of volume of capital invested in Poland between 2000 and 2022, six are from South Korea. [In 2022, trade between Poland and Korea reached USD 10 billion.](#)

Poland's relations with Korea are developing very well and are now entering a new phase. Financial support for trade and investment financing [is currently very important](#). This is why Bank Pekao S.A. signed [a cooperation agreement](#) on corporate banking services for companies operating in these countries with Korea's largest bank, KB Kookmin Bank.

The consequences for relations between Poland and South Korea could be significant. During the period when the PiS party dominated Polish politics, many contracts were signed between Warsaw and Seoul. Firstly a contract for the construction and development of the [central airport](#) was signed. The main institutional partner in this investment is the Incheon Airport of Seoul. The whereabouts of this issue are however uncertain and as of now cannot be determined. Secondly, [Nuclear projects realized in cooperation with South Korean companies will be not given up according to politicians of the Civic Coalition](#). Thirdly some military projects are not only essential but also strategical for the Polish army in the context of the Russian threat. Therefore, they will be also maintained.

Conclusion

The appointment of Donald Tusk is marking an important change for Poland, after eight years of tense relations with Brussels over issues ranging from the independence of the judiciary to minority rights. The high voter turnout and the generally positive reception of Polish elections abroad will also create some beneficial capital that can be used in relations with neighbors and allies. It seems that in the short term, the new government will probably continue to expand and modernize the army and improve relations with the EU and large European countries, including Ukraine, whose security is closely linked to the willingness of Warsaw. Poland's two strategic priorities, cooperation with the US and deterring Russia, will probably remain unchanged. In the long term, the currency of Poland shall also appreciate which will slightly decline the competitiveness of the Polish economy.

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