




## **Weekly Briefing**

**Poland external relationship briefing:  
Elections to the European Parliament in Poland, May 2019  
Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska**

### **China-CEE Institute**

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.  
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin  
Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 [office@china-cee.eu](mailto:office@china-cee.eu)

 [china-cee.eu](http://china-cee.eu)

## **Elections to the European Parliament in Poland, May 2019**

*On Sunday, 26 May, 2019, elections to the European Parliament were held in Poland. Citizens voting in Poland selected 52 MEPs. These were the fourth elections to the EP since Poland's accession to the European Union. Although the Poles chose their representatives for one of the most important institutions of the European Union, the dominant topics in the campaign were not present issues or future challenges of Europe, but strictly Polish matters, especially those related to social assistance, significance of a traditional family, health service, fight against pedophilia and patriotism understood as something that is "our, Polish" and not imposed by the European Union, in which the membership is, after all, considered as a great success by 87% of Poles. Analyzing this battle - de facto treated as primary fight before the elections for the Polish parliament scheduled for autumn this year - attention should be paid not to the campaign itself (which was rather demeritorius), but to the issues of opinion polls presented constantly by the parties and the media, the issue of confidence in individual party groups and the reasons for their success or failure.*

The Polish National Electoral Commission announced the final results of the European Parliament elections on Monday afternoon (May 27). The official election results are as follows:

1. in the first place was the Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), which received 45.38% of votes (altogether 6.192,780 votes); this translates into 27 seats in EP;
2. the second place was taken by the European Coalition with the result 38.47% of votes (altogether 5.249,935 votes); the Coalition won 22 seats. The European Coalition, combines many parties representing central, liberal and leftist circles and is understood as a broad opposition to PiS (Civic Platform, Democratic Left Alliance, Greens, Modern, Now!, Democratic Party, Polish People's Party, Union of European Democrats, Social Democracy of Poland, Liberty and Equality, League of Polish Families and Feminist Initiative);
3. Robert Biedroń's Spring (Wiosna) came third with 6.06% of votes (826.975 votes); it won 3 seats.

Below the electoral threshold, which is 5% of votes, were the extremely right-wing Confederation of KORWiN, Braun, Liroy, Narodowcy (Konfederacja) – 4.55% (621.188 votes). Moreover Kukiz'15 gained support at the level of 3.69% (503.564 votes), and the Left Together (Lewica Razem) earned 1.24% of votes (168.745). Other electoral committees (Polska

Fair Play, Polexit - Koalicja, Jedność Narodu) obtained results lower than 1% (altogether 84.134 votes).

Despite the fact that nine committees took part in the election race, it was the rivalry of the strongest - namely Law and Justice and the European Coalition - that dominated the election fight. After the announcement of the first survey results, which pointed smaller differences between the main opponents, the Leader of Law and Justice Jarosław Kaczyński thanked all “advisers, sociologists, all those people who, with great effort, did not give up in better and worse times, and worked harder”. In turn, chairman of the Civic Platform (leading party in the European Coalition) Grzegorz Schetyna said that these elections “are the first half of the match. We know everything is still ahead of us”. Later he admitted “we took a big step together, together we have built a European Coalition and this is our great success”.

The results of the elections have proved to be a surprise, even for the winners, and they show the great change that has taken place over the last few years in the voters’ awareness, their interest in politics, their engagement in the politicians’ accountability for the election promises and social commitment of the citizens. The elections showed moreover what politicians and many commentators of political life do not want to see. Namely, closing up in a bubble of statistics and empty phrases, which caused the failure of several political parties and the emergence of only three parties that will finally send their representatives to the EP. In recent years there has been also a huge change in quality of lives of many Poles and indeed mainly Law and Justice Party was able to respond to the specific Polish need of feeling European, but at the same time being in a safe, Polish home, where there is economic growth and social support (as in western Europe), but at the same time, problems known from foreign media (immigrants, riots in the streets, etc.) are not at risk. The other parties were silent about this subject or did not notice it, thus not responding to current social moods.

### **Reasons for the success of Law and Justice**

Law and Justice, so far the party voted for by the conservative inhabitants of eastern Poland, now performed a breach and gained significant support in most of the regions - also in Lower Silesia and the municipalities in Wielkopolska, which until now were bastions of the Civic Platform.

The reasons for PiS success can be understood only in relation to the situation in Poland, because in these elections the European issues were really marginal - the victory was the triumph of the future vision of Poland and not of Europe. The causes were as follows:

- phenomenal activation of their own electorate and renouncing the undecided voters to their vision of Poland (to a lesser extent the vision of Europe);

- gaining largely the support of residents in the countryside (59.1%). This means that a significant part of PiS electorate were former voters of the Polish People's Party (currently a member of the European Coalition), which indicates that the profile of PiS voters is changing - this is no longer just a party of citizens living in the eastern, poorer part of Poland, but more and more often residents of villages or small towns throughout the country that chose Law and Justice as their political representation;

- actual implementation of the electoral program - Law and Justice consistently implements its postulates, and yet voters expect that the government will fulfill its promises;

- social support - the main electorate of PiS is the elderly generation, therefore a one-off, additional pension (the so called Thirteen pension or Retirement+) worked as planned. According to the exit poll of IPSOS, the highest percentage of voters were people aged 50-59 and voters 60+. Therefore the populist and expensive service proved to be motivating to vote for PiS;

- creation of a powerful party machine with huge financial resources, but at the same time implementation of earlier election promises.

### **Reasons for the failure of the European Coalition**

Commentators in Poland are speaking now about the Americanization of the political scene and that a two-party system is being created in Poland. However, it is too early to say so, but the situation is in progress. The European Coalition is a faction that associates several political entities. If each of these entities separately took part in the elections to the European Parliament, then the EC's result would be fragmented and there would be no question of Americanization of the political scene. The fact is that the result of such fragmentation would be a greater failure of center-left groups and a more successful PiS victory.

The reasons for failure can be explained as follows and only in reference to individual members of the European Coalition:

- the European Coalition has almost become a twin entity to the United Right (Law and Justice Party together with the two other right-wing parties of two important ministers Jarosław Gowin and Zbigniew Ziobro), but with one exception. Civic Platform is not able to exert such a strong influence on other entities, as PiS did with the party of Gowin and Ziobro. So the

departure of any smaller group from the coalition may immediately affect weakening and creating divisions in the camp;

- the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) lost the battle for its hard electorate – the rural one. With the possible departure of the PSL from the coalition, they may face a similar fate, which is experienced by another party - the Democratic Left Alliance. It is worth noting that the Polish People's Party is treated as a rotating party, therefore it is possible that the PSL will stay alive, only thanks to PiS, which could see in this party a coalition partner for the upcoming elections in autumn;

- in turn, the location of Modern (Nowoczesna, N.) is much more difficult than the PSL, because N. does not have such extensive structures as the PSL. Staff shortages, transfers from N. to Civic Platform and financial problems imply further doubts about this political project;

- the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD) maintained the status quo in the number of EP seats that were obtained by their representatives (five in 2014 and five in 2019). Interestingly, the SLD within the EC won 5 seats with the support of around 6% (810,000 votes) on the national scale - it is two more seats than the Robert Biedron's party Spring (Wiosna), for which almost 827.000 people voted.

Therefore, participation in the European Coalition was very profitable for this party;

- the strongest grouping in the Coalition, Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) was disappointed by the results and probably in near future may take over some of the members of the above-mentioned parties, but it still will be too little to compete with such a consolidated opponent as PiS. The PO also failed to attract the centrist electorate through the involvement of Donald Tusk (earlier chairman of PO, now chairman of the European Council); in addition, the slogans and topics of the campaign used by PO (i.e. pedophilia in the Catholic Church, reform of the education system, ecology) did not meet with wide interest of voters.

### **The situation of Robert Biedroń's Spring**

There is also the issue of the party of Robert Biedroń, which is a perfect example, that it is not worth to hope in polls. The group, established in March 2019, competed with around 16% support and lost 10% within 3 months. It is the only Polish party that recorded such a large drop in 90 days. Spring was a fresh breeze in Polish politics, but the closer to the elections, its situation was getting worse.

The party's postulates focus on aspects related to worldview and ecology. However, this is not enough to be a real alternative to the European Coalition or PiS. The election result of Robert Biedroń's Spring proves that building a strong position on the Polish political scene is

not such a simple task at all. In turn, taking away the votes of the party Left Together should not be any achievement for the grouping that wants to aspire to a strong third force in Polish politics. Therefore the upcoming elections to the National Parliament will be a real test for Spring. The proposals of this party are primarily directed to the domestic policy of the state (i.e. the secular state, departure from coal industry, more efficient health service), hence paradoxically, if Spring can count on a better result, it is in the autumn elections.

### **Conclusion**

Today we are witnessing the evolution of the Polish party system, in which space is created for groups able to cooperate with each other or effectively impose their narrative. Previous years indicate that few political parties have been able to cooperate well.

Elections to the European Parliament are a different process than to the national parliament, because the representation of the nation is small (only 52 seats), hence the voters may calculate that it is better to have a strong representation of two or three groups, than to have MEPs representing small parties, whose influence on the functioning of the EP will be insignificant.

Nevertheless, it must be said that these elections proved to be a success of democracy in Poland. For the first time, the turnout was very large (for Polish conditions) - 45.68%. In comparison, in previous elections the turnout was 23.83%, in 2009 it was 24.53% and in 2004 - 20.87%.

And despite the fact that the public opinion talks about the PiS victory and the defeat of the Coalition, it is necessary to look at these choices from a broader perspective - PiS won 6,19 million votes in the election, and the democratic opposition (European Coalition together with Spring) 6,07 million. In mandates it was 27 to 25. As for the real power in the European Parliament, the deputies of the EC and Spring will co-rule there, and the PiS will be a part of the opposition. Probably also very poor one, because of the fatal result of the British conservatives with whom they so far formed one parliamentary faction.

Therefore, on the contrary to the highlights presented in the media, there was no sudden change in the image of Polish political scene. There are still two large political camps, differing statistically significantly from each other in the issues of education, place of residence, professed values, etc. Moreover there is still quite a large camp of anti-system voters, including

those with very extreme views. In autumn, these two camps will undertake another electoral battle. Politicians now depend on what party configuration this encounter will take. Due to electoral law in Poland, this is a crucial decision, since many voices can easily be lost through careless movements. What has changed is certainly political dynamics. The opposition has declared a failure and begun settlements, instead of mobilizing itself to harder work. The wind blows in PiS and personally in Kaczyński's sails, but in reality nothing is yet sealed.