



# Weekly Briefing

**Poland political briefing:**  
**Referendum combined with parliamentary election**  
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## **Referendum combined with parliamentary election**

### **Summary**

*This year's parliamentary elections in Poland, to be held on 15th of October, will be combined with a nationwide referendum. The ruling party has decided that it will ask the opinion of Poles on issues such as the admission of illegal immigrants to Poland, raising the retirement age, dismantling the wall on the border between Poland and Belarus and selling state property into private hands. The referendum is part of the Polish election campaign and aims to mobilize an electorate close to the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) on issues on which Polish society has fairly crystallized views. The referendum is criticized by the opposition, which sees it as part of the ruling party's election campaign, and the referendum questions as biased.*

### **Introduction**

The idea of holding a referendum was proposed by the leader of Poland's ruling camp, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, back in June in response to an EU proposal for a forced relocation mechanism for illegal immigrants. Initially, it was to deal only with this issue. However, in August, Law and Justice proposed three more questions. After a heated debate, the Polish parliament decided that the referendum would be held in conjunction with the parliamentary elections and would include 4 questions – all on 15th of October.<sup>i</sup>

### **Referendum questions are presented by the prominent Law and Justice politicians**

The referendum will include four questions, according to those in power, on "key" issues that citizens should decide. They will read as follows:

*"Do you support selling off state assets to foreign entities, leading to the loss of control of Poles over strategic sectors of the economy?"*,

*"Do you support raising the retirement age, including the restoration of the increased retirement age for men and women to 67?"*,

*"Do you support the removal of the barrier on the border of the Republic of Poland with the Republic of Belarus?"*,

*"Do you support the admission of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, in accordance with the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy?"*.

The questions were presented in the following days in special recordings by prominent Law and Justice politicians - Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Deputy Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński, former Prime Minister Beata Szydło and Minister of National Defense Mariusz Blaszczak <sup>ii</sup>

Jarosław Kaczyński, in a video presenting one of the referendum questions, indicated that for his party, the vote of ordinary Poles is decisive. - The voice of foreign politicians, including German ones, has no meaning. That is why on key issues we want to appeal to you directly, in a referendum," the Law and Justice chairman explained. <sup>iii</sup> Kaczyński, in announcing the question on the sale of state-owned companies, indicated that it was due to the fact that, in his view, the political base of the current opposition is openly saying that the PiS-led process of increasing the importance of strategic companies in Poland should be reversed. - We cannot agree to this. Decide whether the assets of generations will remain in Polish hands," Jaroslaw Kaczynski appealed.

The Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki stressed that his government had opposed the forced relocation mechanism for immigrants from the beginning. His recording included a statement by opposition leader and former Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who years ago said that "if the Polish government is determined not to participate in solidarity in the refugee issue, this will inevitably entail certain consequences." <sup>iv</sup> Morawiecki said that after years, the issue of migrant relocation "is back on the EU agenda." - We in Poland do not want this," he announced. - We need strong support. We say no to illegal immigration," the head of government stressed. In doing so, he referred to "the situation in Western Europe." - Rape, murder, arson, vandalizing of streets, horror districts," he listed. Finally, Morawiecki claimed that "Tusk is the biggest threat to Poland's security" and called him "an envoy of the Brussels elite."

In the video, Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said that "Poland could become Putin's next target, and our security is under real threat." - That is why we are consistently strengthening the Polish Army and consistently building a barrage on the border with Belarus and Russia," he said.<sup>v</sup> As in previous recordings on the content of the referendum questions, the Law and Justice Party hit out at Donald Tusk. - Donald Tusk and his team first liquidated military units in eastern Poland, then criticized us for building a barrier on the border with Belarus, and then announced its liquidation. We will not allow this," he pointed out.

In turn, the recording of former Prime Minister Beata Szydło featured statements from politicians associated with the opposition. "There is no need to raise the retirement age, it is possible to create the possibility of choice," - said then-President Bronislaw Komorowski (Civic Platform). Immediately after his words in the spot we saw Donald Tusk, who announced: I accept raising the retirement age to 67.<sup>vi</sup> - So they lied about it," commented Szydło. The government of former Prime Minister Donald Tusk decided to gradually raise the retirement age, a decision the current government has reversed.

### **Heated debate in parliament**

As Law and Justice (PiS) MP Marek Ast said during a parliamentary debate on the organization of the referendum on the day of the parliamentary elections, the "fundamental advantage" of voting on the same day is to be that "the turnout in the referendum will be able to be such that the referendum will become binding on any government that is chosen in the elections." (according to Polish law, for a referendum to be binding, at least 50 percent of those eligible to vote must take part).

The leader of the club of the largest opposition party, the Civic Coalition (KO), spoke in the debate - This will be no referendum. It will be an attempt to circumvent all campaign finance laws," he assessed.<sup>vii</sup> - You have drawn up an indictment against your own inept governments. After all, you are the ones who recently imported a record number of non-EU workers, causing a huge crisis in Poland. It is you who are responsible for the hole in the fence, which is ridiculed by the whole world as an example of the absolute ineptitude of this government. But above all, it is you who are responsible for selling off Poland's national silver for nothing. You have sold out, you have given into the hands of people with ties to Putin a part of the Polish oil sector (the sale of shares in the Lotos fuel company to the Saudi Aramco concern of Saudi Arabia - note

KR). You are trying to deceive voters for your own political gain," said the head of the KO club.

He was answered by MP Ast. - What are you afraid of, democratic opposition? If you are really so democratic, why don't you want to give a voice to the sovereign? Why don't you want to vote for the celebration of democracy, which is the referendum? Why don't you want to answer questions that concern fundamental issues for citizens: border security, (...) internal security," Ast addressed the opposition.

- You are throwing in the faces of Poles unimportant issues that no one, no party, is raising today," Krzysztof Gawkowski of the Left Club said in turn. He argued that no one in the opposition is currently talking about raising the retirement age, forced relocation, or privatization. - This referendum is reaching a cobblestone, you want to steal the celebration of democracy from the Poles, you are combining parliamentary elections with a referendum, you want to take away the voice and the opportunity for the Poles to have their say (...). We will not participate in this, the political chutzpah must be boycotted, today we say a bold "no" to the referendum," said the head of the Left club.

### **Conclusion**

The opinions of Poles on the issues covered by the referendum questions proposed by the current ruling camp are quite clear. The majority of the public does not want to raise the retirement age, opposes the admission of illegal immigrants, is against "selling off state assets" and opposes dismantling the wall on Poland's border with Belarus. Hence the choice of these referendum issues by Law and Justice in a referendum to be combined with parliamentary elections. The Polish opposition criticizes the combination of the referendum with the elections, describing the move as being in line with the government's election strategy. It also criticizes the biased wording of the referendum questions suggesting certain answers. Most of the opposition is therefore calling for a boycott of the referendum, so it is uncertain whether it will be binding. For it to be so, more than half of those eligible to vote must participate.

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- i [Rzeczpospolita daily newspaper https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art38966231-sejm-zdecydowal-referendum-pis-w-dniu-wyborow-parlamentarnych](https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art38966231-sejm-zdecydowal-referendum-pis-w-dniu-wyborow-parlamentarnych)
- ii [Economic portal Money.pl https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/pis-zada-polakom-cztery-pytania-odslonil-wszystkie-karty-6930474339855136a.html](https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/pis-zada-polakom-cztery-pytania-odslonil-wszystkie-karty-6930474339855136a.html)
- iii [The Polish Radio portal https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/artykul/3223387,jaroslav-kaczynski-ujawnil-pierwsze-pytanie-w-referendum-znamy-jego-tresc](https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/artykul/3223387,jaroslav-kaczynski-ujawnil-pierwsze-pytanie-w-referendum-znamy-jego-tresc)
- iv [Polsat TV Portal https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2023-08-13/referendum-pis-zaprezentowal-trzecie-pytanie/](https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2023-08-13/referendum-pis-zaprezentowal-trzecie-pytanie/)
- v [News portal Onet.pl https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/poznalismy-czwarte-pytanie-w-referendum-blaszczak-ujawnil-szczegoly/0wk223z](https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/poznalismy-czwarte-pytanie-w-referendum-blaszczak-ujawnil-szczegoly/0wk223z)
- vi [Polsat TV portal https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2023-08-12/drugie-pytanie-referendalne-pis-zdradzil-jego-tresc/](https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2023-08-12/drugie-pytanie-referendalne-pis-zdradzil-jego-tresc/)
- vii [TVN24 TV portal https://tvn24.pl/wybory-parlamentarne-2023/referendum-w-dniu-wyborow-2023-debata-i-glosowanie-nad-wnioskiem-w-sprawie-zarzadzenia-referendum-w-sejmie-7294998](https://tvn24.pl/wybory-parlamentarne-2023/referendum-w-dniu-wyborow-2023-debata-i-glosowanie-nad-wnioskiem-w-sprawie-zarzadzenia-referendum-w-sejmie-7294998)