



Weekly Briefing

**Poland external relations briefing:
Changes in Poland's European policy after parliamentary elections
Konrad Rajca**

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Ju Weiwei

Kiadásért felelős személy: Feng Zhongping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 office@china-cee.eu

 china-cee.eu

Changes in Poland's European policy after parliamentary elections

Summary

The change of government in Poland, which is likely to take place by the end of the year, in the area of foreign and security policy, will mean changes above all in European politics. The opposition groups planning to form a government are united above all by a desire to improve relations with Brussels and Berlin, which have deteriorated significantly during the eight-year rule of the United Right. The opposition rhetoric of a 'return to Europe' and an end to Poland's 'isolation in the EU' won the election. This included criticism of the right-wing government in the area of limiting the independence of the judiciary and the media from power, which was also criticised by Brussels. This appears to have been one of the important, though not decisive, reasons for the electoral defeat of the outgoing government. Opposition leader Donald Tusk's first action in international affairs was a trip to Brussels, where he sought to unblock billions of euros of EU funds for Poland from the National Recovery Plan. There, however, he also expressed scepticism about plans to strengthen the federalisation of the Union presented by Germany and France and about the migration pact. In the other key fields of Polish foreign and security policy, i.e. relations with the USA and support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, no significant changes in Polish policy are to be expected following the opposition's victory, despite temporary tensions regarding Ukrainian grain during the Polish election campaign.

Introduction

The main theme of the completed election campaign in Poland was the issue of accepting illegal migrants, and one of the topics was also the issue of the symbolic 'return to Europe', understood by the opposition and most of the public as an improvement in relations with Brussels. The ruling United Right identified itself as the guarantor of the country's security and guardian of Polish sovereignty. The ruling camp based its campaign on creating a division between the patriotic camp, which firmly defends Poland's interests in Europe and does not yield to foreign influence, and the 'hostile to Poland' camp, i.e. yielding to pressure and pressures from Germany and the European Union in the context of, for example, plans to deepen European integration that strengthen the power of EU institutions over member states. The

opposition, on the other hand, emphasised the desire to end Poland's 'isolation' in Europe, which was linked - as it stressed - to the internal policy of the Law and Justice party concerning the reduction of the independence of the media and the judiciary, which led to a deterioration of relations with Brussels. A consequence of the deterioration of these relations was the non-payment to Poland of billions of euros from the EU's Reconstruction Fund, the money from which can be used for new investments related to the energy transition.

The key European Union

A week after the elections, opposition candidate for Prime Minister, Civic Platform (PO) leader Donald Tusk flew to Brussels for a series of meetings at EU institutions. He addressed a press conference with the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. - 'I had to take the initiative before the final post-election decisions are made, because it is necessary to use all methods, even non-standard ones, to save the money that Poland is entitled to (KPO funds - KR),' he said.ⁱ According to the election result, the agreement of the 3 opposition parties will have a governmental majority in the future parliament, but the procedures related to the formation of the new government (which is appointed by the president), may drag on until the end of the year.

- Almost ten years ago, in my first speech as President of the European Council, I said that I came to Brussels with a strong sense of purpose,' Donald Tusk said at a conference with the head of the European Commission. - I think I can repeat those words today. The goal today is to rebuild the position of my country in Europe, to strengthen the European Union as a whole,' he stressed. - The results of the elections in Poland and the incredible turnout, also among the youngest voters, showed clearly, probably to the whole of Europe, that democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, European unity are still important for our citizens. I am immensely proud of my compatriots. They proved that anti-democratic, anti-European sentiment need not be a trend, that these were, I hope, simply temporary disturbances," the PO leader said. He also admitted that he was "very proud to be Polish, to be European". - We have all proved to ourselves, but also to the world, that if you believe in change, if you make the effort, it will pay off, and it has indeed happened. Dear Ursula, the Poles have been waiting for this moment for a very long time, a very long eight years," he concluded.

Tusk: Poland returns to full EU presence

- I am here today, at the headquarters of the European Commission, to speed up the process of Poland's return to full presence in the European Union. We are returning to this path with full conviction that this is the will of the Polish voters,' he said. - I am still here as leader

of the opposition, not as prime minister, but time passes and inexorably so. I had to take this initiative before the final post-election decisions are made, because it is necessary to use all methods, even non-standard ones, to save the money that Poland deserves, which stems from both traditional European funds and reconstruction funds, the so-called KPO (National Reconstruction Plan) - he pointed out.

Von der Leyen said that she and Tusk would "discuss today important issues where Poland's voice is crucial". Here she listed the issues of support for Ukraine, the European security architecture, economic modernisation and competitiveness.

The leader of Civic Platform: Poland can count on the EU's flexibility and support

Europe is hungry for a serious conversation and an honest relationship with Poland, hence this unusual meeting. I am an informal guest here and it is clear that we have to wait for the transfer of power to be completed," said Tusk after the meeting with the head of the European Commission.ⁱⁱ He stressed that after an earlier meeting with Polish President Andrzej Duda, he had reason for "moderate optimism" that the president would not prolong the transfer of power in Poland. "Everything indicates that this cooperation should be as harmonious as possible. I am keen that cooperation with the president on European issues, especially the money expected in Poland, should be as good as possible. And a lot will depend on the president, on his attitude". - added the PO leader.

Donald Tusk stated that "we can certainly count, just as the outgoing government could count, on a very far-reaching flexibility on the part of the European institutions". He referred here to the so-called milestones required by Brussels for the payment of funds to Poland. - The new government must demonstrate very quickly that it is capable of restoring the rule of law in Poland, both through legislation, where we will need the cooperation of the president, and through everyday practice, he stressed. ⁱⁱⁱ He said that the mechanism for disbursing money from the Reconstruction Fund is a flexible one - meaning that you can start disbursing money with confidence in the process of changing the law that has started and will be able to stop that disbursement if that process does not continue.

The European Commission approved the Polish NRP in June 2022, which was a step towards the EU disbursing 23.9 billion euros in grants and 11.5 billion euros in loans under the Reconstruction Fund, but the money has not been disbursed. The EC noted that the Polish NRP "contains milestones related to important aspects of the independence of the judiciary, which are of particular importance for improving the investment climate and creating the conditions

for effective implementation" and that "Poland must demonstrate that these milestones have been achieved before any disbursements under the Reconstruction Fund can be made".

The KPO is a programme that consists of 54 investments and 48 reforms. It is intended to strengthen the Polish economy and make it more able to withstand any crisis. In line with EU targets, a significant part of the budget is to be allocated to climate objectives (42.7 per cent) and digital transformation (21.3 per cent). To date, the funds have not been disbursed to Poland, linked to protracted arrangements for meeting the requirements to guarantee disbursement between the Polish government and Brussels, conflict within the government camp and, as highlighted by some commentators, a lack of trust and reluctance from Brussels towards the policy of the Polish government, which has insisted that issues of national judiciary do not fall within the competence of the European Union.

Support on the Ukrainian and Belarusian issues

Speaking about Ukraine, Donald Tusk conveyed that he had heard from the head of the EC "a readiness to cooperate fully on Ukrainian issues". - The Commission is absolutely aware of the burdens and efforts that Poland and Poles are bearing in connection with the war and refugees, not only from Ukraine, he said. We will be able to count on substantial assistance in strengthening the protection of our eastern border, above all with Belarus. I am also talking about the practical and financial consequences of this cooperation, the head of the PO added.

Tusk conveyed that the issue of Ukrainian grain was also raised during the meeting with the EC head. "There is no doubt whatsoever about our very firm position that Ukrainian grain cannot be a threat to Polish farmers. Madam President understands this very well, that we have to find a solution that will not be annoying from the Ukrainian point of view, because we want to help Ukraine, but under no circumstances can it threaten the interests of Polish farmers," - he said.

Meeting with the European People's Party

The President of the Civic Platform also met the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, and took part in a meeting of the leaders of the European People's Party (EPP), to which the Civic Platform belongs. The good electoral result of the Polish opposition, giving the opportunity to form a future government headed by Donald Tusk, prompted many enthusiastic comments from EU officials, who point out that this is a breakthrough in Polish politics and a new opening in Poland's European policy.

One of the topics of discussion at the EPP summit was the unblocking of KPO funds for Poland. Until last year, it was Donald Tusk (former head of the European Council) who headed the EPP. It is these contacts of Donald Tusk that are supposed to help with the promised unblocking of funds from the National Reconstruction Plan. According to Manfred Weber, head of the EPP, the best way to do this would be "to form a new government quickly"^{iv}. He said he was aware that President Andrzej Duda has a constitutional right to set 'deadlines' for the formation of a new government, but, in his view, there are 'some delays' in doing so. According to Weber, the full unblocking of KPO funds will not happen immediately. Declarations will be insufficient, leaving out necessary reforms and legal steps. The unblocking of funds will proceed gradually - 'step by step'. The first is to be the emphasised formation of the government, followed by an assessment by the European Commission.

Donald Tusk sceptical about federalisation of the Union and the migration pact

In Brussels, Donald Tusk also spoke about the planned reform of the European Union pushed by Germany and France, aimed at deepening the federalisation of the Community, and about the migration pact. Answering journalists' questions, he said that political revolutions are not needed in the European Union and he is sceptical about many proposals to amend the EU treaties.^v - In the face of many provisions, which I would say are overambitious, I am sceptical from the outset," admitted Donald Tusk.

The proposal for far-reaching changes to the EU treaties (the Treaty on the Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the Union) arouses controversy primarily in connection with the desire to abolish the right of veto in 65 areas and the consequences of transferring further competences of nation states to Brussels.

- Our concern is to strengthen the very unity of the Union as it exists today. In my opinion, the Union does not need these constitutional revolutions. Regardless of the French or German position, in my opinion it is in the interest of the citizens of Europe and the Member States for Europe as it is to function efficiently again and to be as united as possible,' Tusk said. The Civic Platform leader assured that he would talk to politicians and MEPs to approach these most revolutionary ideas with restraint and great caution.

Asked about the issue of the EU migration pact, Tusk recalled that he had opposed forced relocation throughout his term as President of the European Council. - I acted effectively on this issue, which is one of the reasons why forced relocation is not a reality, because as head of the European Council I effectively blocked this idea. (...) If there is our government, nothing

will change on this issue: there will be no forced relocation, Poland will certainly not participate in this mechanism," he noted.^{vi}

Tensions in relations with Ukraine

Much commentary in Poland and around the world was triggered by Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's statement during the Polish election campaign about further support for Ukraine in the context of tensions regarding Ukrainian grain in Poland. - We are no longer transferring armaments to Ukraine, we are now arming ourselves with the most modern weapons, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said. He added that he is betting on the modernisation and rapid arming of the Polish army so that in a short time it becomes one of the strongest in Europe.^{vii}

Government spokesman Piotr Müller later clarified that Poland was only implementing previously agreed ammunition and armaments deliveries, including those resulting from signed contracts with Ukraine.^{viii} The Polish Prime Minister's statement took place during a dispute between Poland and Ukraine over Poland's introduction of an embargo on imports of Ukrainian grain. It resulted in an announcement by the Ukrainian authorities to refer the embargo to the World Trade Organisation (this was eventually dropped by Ukraine).

Prime Minister Morawiecki asked whether the Polish government was considering reducing aid to Ukraine in the wake of the grain crisis, said that Poland was helping Ukraine in its fight against Russia, but the government could not agree to upset the Polish market. - We will certainly maintain the transit of Ukrainian goods. Poland does not incur any costs because of this. On the contrary, it can be said that we make money on it," he stated. The Prime Minister added that the government will certainly not risk the security of Ukraine. - Our hub in Rzeszów, in agreement with the Americans and with NATO, has been performing the same role it has been performing and will continue to perform all the time, he assured.

Mateusz Morawiecki was also asked about President Andrzej Duda's words uttered in New York that Ukraine was behaving like a drowning person grasping at everything. - These are very apt words,' he stated. - If I were to look for something to justify (Ukraine), it would only be what we all know very well: that Ukraine is defending itself against a bestial Russian attack and we understand that this attack is creating a completely unprecedented situation, one that we have not faced since the Second World War. This is regular war simply," he said.

The German Chancellor on the 'visa affair' in Poland

The case of the so-called “visa scandal” in Poland concerning irregularities discovered in Poland in the issuing of visas to citizens of African and Asian countries, which could have international repercussions, has received a comment from German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. - The visa scandal going on in Poland needs to be investigated, said German Chancellor at the end of September. ^{ix} . "Given the current situation at the borders, Scholz called for an explanation of possible irregularities in the issuing of visas by Poland," DPA agency reported. I would not like Poland to simply wave its hand," Olaf Scholz stated. According to the German chancellor, it should be that "everyone who comes to Poland is registered there and undergoes the asylum procedure there, instead of visas that were somehow granted for money, exacerbating the problem". The Chancellor said he would discuss the issue with the Polish government and mentioned the possibility of introducing border controls with Poland and other neighbouring countries.

Due to an increased influx of illegal migrants into Germany, German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser announced at the end of September that the country was strengthening border controls with Poland and the Czech Republic. The aim is to reduce the influx of illegal immigrants. Faeser added that the changes are being made in cooperation with the governments in Warsaw and Prague, so the approval of the European Commission is not necessary.^x The controls are flexible and prioritised. Also at the end of September, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki instructed the head of the Polish Interior Ministry, the Interior Ministry, to control vans and cars at the Polish-Slovak border, which may be used by migrants who do not have the right to enter Poland. Recently, the Polish Border Guard has been stopping more and more people there who are trying to illegally enter Germany via Poland via the so-called Balkan route.

Conclusion

The parliamentary elections in Poland, as a result of which the opposition parties will have a governmental majority, in the area of foreign and security policy means above all changes in Polish policy within the European Union. It is to be expected that relations with Brussels will improve, relations with Germany will normalise, relations with Germany will intensify and the level of coordination of European policy with this country will increase, and closer relations on EU issues with Hungary will be abandoned. Relations with the United States, or regarding support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, should not be significantly modified, despite temporary tensions regarding Ukrainian grain during the Polish election campaign. Greater coordination of Polish policy on relations with Ukraine with the European Union can be expected. In the context of relations with China, which are not widely discussed in Polish public discourse (China appears most often in the context of Russia), a greater level of coordination of the Polish position with the German and EU positions can be anticipated.

i _____ The TVN24 TV portal <https://tvn24.pl/polska/donald-tusk-jest-juz-w-brukseli-reuters-stawka-unijne-fundusze-dla-polski-7407545>

ii _____ The Portal of daily Dziennik Gazeta Prawna <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/9330636,tusk-po-spotkaniu-z-von-der-leyen-mozemy-liczyc-na-elastycznosc-ze-st.html>

iii _____ The TVN24 TV portal <https://tvn24.pl/polska/donald-tusk-jest-juz-w-brukseli-reuters-stawka-unijne-fundusze-dla-polski-7407545>

iv _____ Weekly Wprost.pl portal <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/11450830/tusk-polecil-do-brukseli-weber-zarysowal-przyszlosc-kpo.html>

v _____ The Portal of the weekly magazine "DoRzeczy" <https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/496188/zmiany-w-traktatach-ue-tusk-jestem-sceptyczny.html>

vi _____ The Economic portal New Industry <https://www.wnp.pl/parlamentarny/wydarzenia/donald-tusk-nie-chce-relokacji-imigrantow-krytykuje-tez-nowy-pomysl-na-unie,767595.html>

vii _____ The Economic portal Money.pl <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/koniec-z-dostawami-broni-do-ukrainy-swiatowe-media-komentuja-decyzje-polski-6943896072375008a.html>

viii _____ The TVN24 TV portal <https://tvn24.pl/polska/wojna-w-ukrainie-premier-mateusz-morawiecki-juz-nie-przekazujemy-uzbrojenia-na-ukrainie-teraz-sami-sie-zbroimy-7353765>

ix _____ The Economic portal BusinessInsider <https://businessinsider.com.pl/wiadomosci/afery-wizowa-w-polsce-kanclerz-niemiec-grozi-kontrolami-na-granicy/93vtld2>

x _____ RMF Radio portal https://www.rmf24.pl/fakty/swiat/news-niemcy-wzmacniają-kontrolę-na-granicy-z-polską,nld,7052681#crp_state=1