



# Weekly Briefing

**Poland political briefing:**  
**The opposition will take power in Poland**  
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# **The opposition will take power in Poland**

## **Summary**

*As a result of the parliamentary elections, the opposition is likely to take power in Poland. Despite the election victory of the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS), the three cooperating opposition groups (The Civic Coalition, the Third Way and the Left) won a majority of seats in the Sejm (lower chamber of Polish parliament) giving them the opportunity to form a new government. They have already signed a coalition agreement, according to which the Civic Coalition (KO) leader Donald Tusk is the candidate for prime minister. During the first session of the new Sejm, Szymon Holownia, leader of the Poland2050 (the Third Way) grouping, was elected Speaker of the Sejm. This shows in practice that the opposition has the necessary majority to form a new government. Earlier, President Andrzej Duda commissioned a mission to establish a new government incumbent Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (PiS), representing the winning grouping. When he fails to secure a majority in the Sejm, the president will appoint the prime minister, who is designated by the Sejm majority. Morawiecki, in turn, has resigned from his current government, but will remain in power until a new one is appointed. The most important challenges for the incoming government are improving relations with Brussels and obtaining billions of euros in funds from the National Recovery Plan (KPO), implementing numerous social election promises, changes in the functioning of the judiciary and public media, as well as decisions to continue the previous government's strategic investments and spending to support the economy.*

## **Introduction**

Poland's parliamentary elections were won by the incumbent ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) winning 35.38 percent of the vote. The Civic Coalition (KO) won 30.7 percent, the Third Way (TD) won 14.4 percent, the New Left (NL) - 8.61 percent, and the Confederation - 7.16 percent of the vote. Only these groupings exceeded the 5 percent threshold to guarantee a presence in the Sejm. Opposition groups that plan to work in coalition (KO, TD, NL) won a total of 248 seats (out of 460), which guarantees a parliamentary majority to form a government (KO - 157 seats, TD - 65, NL - 26). The Law and Justice party won 194 seats, and the Confederation won 18. In the upper house of the Polish parliament - the Senate, there will be

66 opposition representatives (some independent, but supporting the opposition) and 34 senators from the PiS party. Turnout in the elections to the Sejm was 74.38%, the highest turnout in a parliamentary election in Poland since 1989.

### **The dispute over the new government**

The result of the Polish elections testifies to a clear desire for a change of power in the country, after a period of 8 years of rule by the United Right coalition. This was determined by the huge mobilization of opponents of the outgoing government, especially the youngest voters. The opposition's gaining of a majority of seats giving it the opportunity to form a government was also determined by the unexpectedly good result of the Christian Democratic grouping Third Way, which scored several percent higher than forecast in most pre-election polls. The conservative-libertarian Confederation, which was the only grouping that could theoretically cooperate with the Law and Justice Party in the new parliament, achieved a much lower result than forecast in the polls.

Under the Polish constitution, the Polish president designates the head of government - usually by naming the candidate of the winning party. He can also name a representative of the coalition that will have a majority in the Sejm. President Andrzej Duda has designated current PiS head of government Mateusz Morawiecki as prime minister. However, parliamentary arithmetic indicates that he does not and will not have enough votes in the Sejm to form a government. After the prime minister and his proposed ministers are appointed (Morawiecki has 14 days to do so), the prime minister has another 14 days to present a program of action and a motion for a vote of confidence. The Sejm passes it by an absolute majority. If the government is not appointed in the first step, the Sejm has the right to elect the prime minister and his proposed government members within the next 14 days. The president then appoints the Council of Ministers so selected and takes the oath of office from them. President Andrzej Duda will then most likely point Donald Tusk as prime minister in mid-December, once he receives a majority in the parliamentary vote.

The President Andrzej Duda's delay in appointing Donald Tusk, who has a parliamentary majority, as prime minister right away is being assessed by the opposition as a game of timing

and political action by the Law and Justice Party-linked President Duda. It is supposed to be a time to "grill" the planned government coalition, highlighting its internal differences and its willingness to deviate from its election promises. It is also supposed to give the outgoing government more time to leaving positions in state institutions before the new cabinet to take over. The outgoing government camp stresses the legitimate action of the President, who is using his powers and acting in accordance with custom in entrusting the mission of forming a government to the winning party.

### **Signing of the coalition agreement by the opposition**

Leaders of the three opposition parties of the Civic Coalition, Third Way and New Left have officially signed a coalition agreement. The agreement was signed by party leaders Szymon Holownia (Poland2050, Third Way), Władysław Kosiniak- Kamysz (Polish People's Party, Third Way), Donald Tusk (KO), Włodzimierz Czarzasty (New Left) and Robert Biedroń (New Left). PSL and Polska2050 ran in the elections as the coalition committee Third Way - It is a great satisfaction that we can pass on the good news: we are ready to initial the text of the coalition agreement, which will be for us a set of signposts and recommendations for our work as soon as we receive such an opportunity from the President," stated Civic Platform Chairman Donald Tusk. - We quickly and unanimously brought the work on this important document to completion," he added. - It was not a race against time. President Duda decided to get some time for himself, for the party in power until now. We will not comment on this today," he said.<sup>i</sup>

According to the agreement, the candidate for prime minister of the coalition will be Donald Tusk (the Civic Platform), the candidates for deputy prime ministers: Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz (PSL) and Krzysztof Gawkowski (New Left). Candidates for rotating Sejm speakers will be: Szymon Holownia (Third Way)- from 13th of November 2023 to 13th of November 2025 - and Włodzimierz Czarzasty (New Left)-from 14th of November 2025 to the end of the term. The candidate for Senate Speaker from 13th of November 2023 to 13th of November 2025 is to be - Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska (KO). The candidate for Speaker of the Senate from 14th of November 2025 until the end of the term will be indicated by the Civic Platform.<sup>ii</sup>

Among the announcements included in the coalition agreement are:

- Measures to unlock EU funds from the National Reconstruction Plan.
- Raises for employees in the budgetary sphere (teachers, public service employees, including administration, courts and prosecutors). The fight against the wage gap between men and women was also announced.
- Holding the predecessor governments accountable.
- Depoliticization of public media, courts and State Treasury Companies.
- Introducing refunds for in vitro treatments
- Relaxing abortion laws (returning to the so-called pre-2020 abortion compromise allowing abortion only in 3 cases: irreversible fetal damage, threat to the life of the mother and rape)
- Abolishing the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau and transferring its resources and powers to other services.

In the coalition agreement, one can read that a review of the institutions established by the predecessors will be carried out, including with regard to their usefulness and operating costs. On the other hand, the belief was expressed that "social benefits must be supplemented, especially in the area of systemic support for families, people with disabilities, caregivers of dependents and seniors.". The agreement also mentions the introduction of favorable and clear rules for calculating the "health contribution". It has been ensured that an employee's sick leave from the first day will be paid by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS). "For entrepreneurs, paying contributions for themselves, we will introduce the possibility of temporary exemption from social security contributions," - was promised.

An important element of the coalition agreement is the announcement of changes in the energy sector. It was promised that "the coalition parties are determined to accelerate the green energy transition." To this end, a stable law is to be created to support a fair energy transition by building financial and technological support systems. It was assured that the new coalition wants to establish a grain port. "We will strive to stabilize the situation in agricultural markets, increase the profitability of production by developing export potential and normalizing relations with third countries and simplifying administrative procedures" - they stressed. <sup>iii</sup>

## **The first session of the new Sejm**

At the inaugural session of the new tenth-term Sejm, Poland 2050 party leader Szymon Holownia (Third Way) was elected Speaker of the Sejm. Before entering politics, Holownia was a well-known journalist and TV presenter. - The Sejm freezer will leave the Speaker's office with a bang, the barriers (in front of the building - KR) will be removed (...). The Sejm will not be an asylum for criminals," said the politician, who was supported by 265 deputies (out of 460).

- I would like to thank the more than 21 million voters who, on October 15, were so unequivocal about Poland's future. They gave us 460 deputies the strongest mandate ever to represent them," said Szymon Holownia. The leader of Poland 2050 announced a meeting with the most experienced parliamentary reporters to restore the parliament's accessibility to the media. A podcast is also to be launched, and press breakfasts and briefings by the Sejm Speaker will also return. - The Sejm will not be someone else's voting machine (...). Nor will it be an arena for a Polish-Polish war," added the new Speaker of the Chamber<sup>iv</sup>. The election of Holownia is a practical and real example of the opposition having a majority in the Sejm, which will be able to form a government. Szymon Holownia's rival in the battle for the post of Speaker of the Sejm was the incumbent, Elżbieta Witek of the Law and Justice Party.

During the session of the Sejm, President Andrzej Duda delivered a message in which he called for cross-party cooperation. - I have always defended and will continue to defend the two most important Polish values for which generations have fought: freedom and solidarity. If I consider that any solution raises serious substantive or legal doubts, I will not hesitate to use the presidential veto or refer the law to the Constitutional Court," he also said. - I want to say from this place to all political formations: a possible presidential veto cannot be an excuse for not fulfilling your election promises," President Duda said. After these words, the deputies burst out laughing.<sup>v</sup> Under the Polish constitution, the president has the right to veto laws passed by parliament, but his objection can be overridden by a 3/5 majority of deputies, which the opposition does not have. Outgoing Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki also spoke, resigning from the government and describing how he sees the last four years in power. In doing so, he summarized the policies of his party. - Only the power that does nothing does not make

mistakes," he said. He called for joining and forming a new coalition in cooperation with PiS.

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The Sejm also elected new deputy speakers. They included representatives of all opposition groups - Krzysztof Bosak (Confederation), Włodzimierz Czarzasty (New Left), Piotr Zgorzelski (Third Way), Monika Wielichowska (the Civic Platform) and Dorota Niedziela (the Civic Platform). The Law and Justice (PiS) candidate, former Sejm Speaker Elzbieta Witek (the Law and Justice), did not obtain a sufficient majority. Opposition deputies accuse her of being biased in her handling of the previous term's Sejm sessions and violating its rules of procedure. The position of deputy speaker for the Law and Justice Party has therefore been left vacant, pending the filing of a new candidacy that receives the support of MPs. Senators elected Malgorzata Kidawa-Błońska (the Civic Platform) to the post of Senate Speaker. Also in the upper house, the Law and Justice candidate for deputy speaker Marek Pęk did not receive the support of senators, so the position for the party also remains vacant.

### **Defence and the new government**

An important area raising questions is the new government's approach to national defense policy. As opposition leaders declare, the incoming government is not planning any major revolution in defense spending, procurement or combat readiness, former Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak (The Civic Platform), who is being considered as the future defense minister, said in an interview with Politico.<sup>vii</sup> In his view, NATO allies should see Poland as a "predictable partner." - We will not go to cancel any contracts. We don't want our allies to see Poland as an unpredictable country," the PO politician explained. - We are concerned about the lack of transparency and dialogue with the opposition and top officials about what is really needed, he said.

In its article, the Financial Times also quotes deputy head of the Poland 2050 party (part of the Third Way grouping) Michal Kobosko. The politician assured that the new government will not cancel binding contracts, but will review any promises made and examine contracts whose exact terms were kept secret. "We will not announce that we will break all signed

contracts, even though we were also surprised that Poland buys everything from the Americans and Koreans, and not from our European partners," he assured the FT.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Defense ministers clash**

Tomasz Siemoniak and Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak (Law and Justice) clashed back in October over the shape and future of the Polish military. Siemoniak, who served as defense minister from 2011 to 2015, called in the media the PiS government's plans for an army of 300,000 soldiers "unrealistic" for demographic reasons, among others. - I said it before the elections and I will repeat it now: we should aim for a 220,000-strong army with 150,000 professional soldiers as its core. This would be more in sync with planned equipment purchases, Poland's demographic situation and the labor market situation," explained the vice-chairman of Civic Platform.<sup>ix</sup> The Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak criticized him for these announcements, writing on the X portal that his formation, once in power, will reduce the number of soldiers by as many as 37,000 (from the current 187,000 to 150,000).<sup>x</sup> Siemoniak denied this and indicated how many soldiers the Polish army will number. He added that there is full agreement among the three coalition partners, who will form the new government with Donald Tusk as the future prime minister, to increase the number of soldiers. In doing so, Minister Blaszczak referred to Siemoniak's alleged statement on RMF FM radio that the army should optimally number 150,000 soldiers, which, according to Blaszczak, should be understood as an announcement: "layoffs in the Polish Armed Forces and the liquidation of units and the reduction of Poland's security."

Former Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak also expressed his reservations on RMF FM radio about the financing of arms purchases by the Armed Forces Support Fund established by the Law and Justice party, suggesting that the funds should come directly from the state budget for greater transparency and control. Regarding the financing of the country's defense, the deputy head of the PO noted that military spending will be maintained at a minimum of 3 percent of GDP: "There is no question that we can reduce our defense efforts - they should be more rational, more effective, while, as a matter of principle, we have to put a lot of money over the next few years into our security. "According to the draft budget bill prepared while the Law and Justice government was still in power, defense spending in 2024 is expected to amount



to about 30 billion euros, which is more than 4 percent of Poland's GDP. This is one of the largest defense budgets in Europe.<sup>xi</sup>

It is worth noting that in 100 specifics for the first 100 days of its rule, the Civic Coalition announced, among other things, the possibility of returning to service all soldiers dismissed from service by the Law and Justice Party after 2015, and the restoration of pension privileges taken away from uniformed personnel. In addition, there is to be an audit of procedures in the army for both promotions and purchases. A white paper is also to be created documenting all decisions with significant financial implications, especially outside of procurement procedures. An army modernization program is also to be made public within 100 days.<sup>xii</sup>

The public discussion in Poland also raises many questions about the future of the strategic investments for Poland launched by the outgoing United Right government. In particular, they concern the huge Central Transport Port investment, which is being carried out in Baranow. Opposition politicians are announcing an audit of the investment, accusing the outgoing government of mismanagement in its implementation and a lack of calculations regarding the profitability of the investment. The future of production of the Polish Izero electric car, which is being built in cooperation with the Chinese company Geely, is also unknown. Representatives of the incoming coalition say there have been delays in the project and mismanagement, a report by Poland's Supreme Chamber of Control also pointed out.

## **Conclusion**

Poland is in an extremely tense post-election period, with the process of taking power from the ruling United Right party of 8 years to a coalition of opposition parties, which won a majority of seats in the Sejm. This is associated with tensions on the PiS-opposition line, as well as on the opposition-president line. Despite the electoral victory, the losing PiS is looking for its place on the political scene and political strategy in connection with a future takeover by the opposition. The current situation points to a sharpening of the party's rhetoric and a descent into hard - total opposition. The current goal of the party's leadership appears to be party consolidation and an attempt to highlight differences within the forming new coalition. The groupings forming the future coalition are divided by issues such as approaches to abortion,

social policy, and economic freedom. PiS's problem, however, is its isolation on the Polish political scene and - which cannot be ruled out - possible tectonic movements within the party (Jaroslaw Kaczynski's term as head of PiS ends in 2024 and he has previously announced that it will be his last). An important role in the future political arrangement will be played by President Andrzej Duda, with veto power to block bills. The Office of the President will become a key center of PiS strategy, where growing political ambitions are already emerging. In turn, the challenge for the new coalition will be to maintain unity, implement the social promises of the election and the announced measures for institutional "cleansing" of the state (media, courts, SOEs, etc.) from the influence of the outgoing government, which will generate tensions. Political confrontation will be compounded by next year's local and European Parliament elections.

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- i [The portal of the Rzeczpospolita daily newspaper https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art39386631-umowa-koalicyjna-podpisana-liderzy-ko-trzeciej-drogi-i-lewicy-zawarli-porozumienie](https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art39386631-umowa-koalicyjna-podpisana-liderzy-ko-trzeciej-drogi-i-lewicy-zawarli-porozumienie)
  - ii [The portal of Dziennik Gazeta Prawna https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/9346963,umowa-koalicyjna-podpisana-co-zawiera-dokument.html](https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/9346963,umowa-koalicyjna-podpisana-co-zawiera-dokument.html)
  - iii [The economic portal BusinessInsider https://businessinsider.com.pl/gospodarka/podwyzki-podatki-i-zmiany-w-spolkach-zalozenia-umowy-koalicyjnej-lista/j0g8fk6](https://businessinsider.com.pl/gospodarka/podwyzki-podatki-i-zmiany-w-spolkach-zalozenia-umowy-koalicyjnej-lista/j0g8fk6)
  - iv [Information portal Interia.pl https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/raport-wybory-parlamentarne-2023/news-poslowie-zdecydowali-jest-nowy-marszalek-sejmu,nld,7145917#utm\\_source=paste&utm\\_medium=paste&utm\\_campaign=chrome](https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/raport-wybory-parlamentarne-2023/news-poslowie-zdecydowali-jest-nowy-marszalek-sejmu,nld,7145917#utm_source=paste&utm_medium=paste&utm_campaign=chrome)
  - v [The economic portal Money.pl https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/po-slowach-andrzeja-dudy-wybuchli-smiechem-goraco-w-sejmie-6962699480832704a.html](https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/po-slowach-andrzeja-dudy-wybuchli-smiechem-goraco-w-sejmie-6962699480832704a.html)
  - vi [The Television Portal TVN24 https://tvn24.pl/polska/mateusz-morawiecki-zlozyl-dymisje-dziekowal-i-zaproponowal-nowa-koalicje-7435461](https://tvn24.pl/polska/mateusz-morawiecki-zlozyl-dymisje-dziekowal-i-zaproponowal-nowa-koalicje-7435461)
  - vii [The Politico Portal https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-incoming-government-siemoniak-wont-cancel-pricey-defense-contracts-military-position/](https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-incoming-government-siemoniak-wont-cancel-pricey-defense-contracts-military-position/)
  - viii [The portal of the Financial Times newspaper https://www.ft.com/content/a157b00f-e4c8-41e4-8a75-437b54b683d7](https://www.ft.com/content/a157b00f-e4c8-41e4-8a75-437b54b683d7)
  - ix [The portal of the weekly magazine "Do Rzeczy" https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/498864/wojsko-siemoniak-przyszly-rzad-nie-planuje-rewolucji.html](https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/498864/wojsko-siemoniak-przyszly-rzad-nie-planuje-rewolucji.html)
  - x [The economic portal Money.pl https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/szef-mon-u-straszy-masowymi-zwolnieniami-w-armii-siemoniak-mu-odpowiada-6954944670136832a.html](https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/szef-mon-u-straszy-masowymi-zwolnieniami-w-armii-siemoniak-mu-odpowiada-6954944670136832a.html)
  - xi [The RMF Fm radio portal https://www.rmfm24.pl/tylko-w-rmf24/popoludniowa-rozmowa/news-siemoniak-polska-nie-ma-potencjalu-demograficznego-do-budowy,nld,7099653#crp\\_state=1](https://www.rmfm24.pl/tylko-w-rmf24/popoludniowa-rozmowa/news-siemoniak-polska-nie-ma-potencjalu-demograficznego-do-budowy,nld,7099653#crp_state=1)
  - xii [The defense portal Defence24.pl https://defence24.pl/polityka-obronna/siemoniak-polska-nie-ma-potencjalu-demograficznego-do-budowy-300-tysiecznej-armii](https://defence24.pl/polityka-obronna/siemoniak-polska-nie-ma-potencjalu-demograficznego-do-budowy-300-tysiecznej-armii)