



Weekly Briefing

Poland external relations briefing:
Changes in Poland's European policy, continued support for Ukraine
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Summary

Significant changes in Polish European policy in 2023 were brought about by the change of government and the assumption of power by the opposition led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk. The change of government will, among other things, improve relations with Brussels and Berlin and open the way for the acquisition of billions of euros in EU funds hitherto blocked for Poland. An important element of the campaign in the Polish parliamentary elections was the issue of the influx of illegal immigrants into the country.

The year 2023 in Polish international policy was dominated by security-related activities in the context of Polish support for Ukraine's actions against the Russian aggressor. Poland was consolidating its role as the main back-up and hub state for Western support for Ukraine. This theme was one of the main topics of world leaders' visits to Warsaw. In the past year, Poland was visited by US President Joe Biden, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski and South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol, among others. However, the year 2023 also saw changes in Polish-Ukrainian relations and the emergence of conflicting economic interests between the two countries, as demonstrated by the introduction of an embargo on imports of Ukrainian agricultural products by Poland and 3 other countries, as well as the blocking of Polish border crossings with Ukraine by Polish transporters.

Introduction

The change of government in Poland in the area of foreign and security policy, will mean changes above all in European politics. The new coalition government is 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 end to Poland's 'isolation in the EU' influenced for the result of the election. The vision of Poland's foreign policy was presented in December by the new Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, in a parliamentary expose. He announced a new opening in European policy and the continuation of Polish actions to support Ukraine. The goal of the new government will be to

strengthen Poland's position in Europe as a "leader of the European Union" and a key element of NATO, as well as a US ally.

Tusk: Poland a leader in the European Union

- Firstly, war at our borders. I don't think I need to convince anyone how important the durability of our alliances is, how important Poland's strong position in the world and in Europe is, a Poland united in the face of danger, how important it is to reiterate, as such, our national dogma - that Poland is and will be a key, strong, sovereign link of the North Atlantic Alliance, that Poland will be a loyal, stable and self-confident ally of the United States, that Poland will regain its leading position in the European Union, that Poland will build up its strength and the position it deserves - and there is no exaggeration in this - as a leader in the European Union,' Donald Tusk declared in expose.ⁱ

I ask everyone to stop pretending that our friends and allies from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union are a threat to Poland. This is really a risky, not to say, crazy game," he stressed. Anyone who has finished primary school, a basic history course, must know that a lone Poland is a Poland exposed to the greatest risks,' he declared. I call on everyone here, without exception, to start working with the new government to put Poland on such strong foundations, in this community that is our community. And to help this government, and me personally, to rebuild Poland's position so that it is Poland that decides what the European Union should look like. And we will really do that," Tusk stressed. The Polish Prime Minister announced that any attempts to change the European Union treaties against Poland's interests are out of the question. - I can reassure you: no manoeuvres, no attempts to play games, no attempts to change the treaties against our interests - these are out of the question," Tusk said.ⁱⁱ

Tusk: we will help Ukraine by looking after Polish interests

New Polish Prime Minister announced that it was the government's job to demand that the West help Ukraine; I will do so from day one. Heartfelt assertiveness is needed when it comes to Polish interests in relation to Ukraine, he pointed out. He stated that he "cannot listen to some politicians, European and also from other Western countries, who say something about being tired of the situation in Ukraine". - I also want to say that Poland's full commitment to Ukraine in this cruel conflict with the Russian aggressor cannot mean a lack of cordial, kind assertiveness when it comes to Polish interests, the interests of Polish entrepreneurs, drivers,

farmers of the Polish state. It really is not that difficult: to help our ally, our brother, Ukraine, which is a friend of ours today and is in mortal combat. It is not so difficult to be able to see the two," stressed Tusk.ⁱⁱⁱ

In October, after parliamentary elections, but while still the leader of the opposition, 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.

Defence and the new government

An important area raising questions is the new government's approach to national defense policy. As leaders of new government 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 was being considered as the defense minister, said in an interview with Politico in November.^{iv} 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.^v

International and security affairs in Polish parliamentary campaign

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 Visa Scandal"

The Polish election campaign has also been heated up by the issue of the so-called "visa scandal" - irregularities in the issuance of Polish visas to citizens of African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries. This case could have influenced the result of the parliamentary elections. The case was accompanied by successive media reports about the sale of Polish visas in African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries with the support of Polish Foreign Ministry (MFA) officials, inspections of opposition deputies in ministries and a petition to the prosecutor's office in the case. Deputy Foreign Ministry head Piotr Wawrzyk, who was in charge of consular affairs, including the visa issuance system, lost his post in connection with the case. He was also the author of a draft regulation on visa facilitation for temporary workers from some 20 countries, including Islamic countries. Prosecution proceedings on the illegal visa issuance procedure in the case are pending against several other intending individuals, including officials.^{vi} The Polish opposition pointed out that the Law and Justice government has granted hundreds of thousands of visas to citizens of non-European countries over the past few years, accompanied by corrupt activities.

A controversial movie about the border with Belarus

Huge tension in the Polish campaign was also caused by the premiere of a film by Polish director Agnieszka Holland, "Green Border," about illegal immigrants trying to cross the Polish border with Belarus. It shows the brutality of the Polish Border Guard's actions against illegal newcomers. By decision of the Polish authorities, a special spot about the Border Guard is being aired in arthouse cinemas before the film. According to the government of Law and Justice

(PiS), the film was biased and insulted the Polish army and border guard, and its premiere took place in “specyfic time” during the election campaign in Poland.^{vii} Politicians from Poland's ruling camp, including the President Andrzej Duda, spoke in a similar tone.^{viii}

The Defense Minister criticizes the previous government's defense plans

The PO-PSL government (which ruled from 2007-2014 - KR) was ready to give up half of Poland in the event of war, said, the head of the Ministry of National Defense (MoD), Law and Justice (PiS) Vice President Mariusz Blaszczak, in an election spot published on social media in September. He referred to the defense plans of the previous government. The opposition described this behavior as treason. The Civil Platform (PO) announced a request for the State Tribunal for declassifying documents for election purposes. Former high commanders also spoke out on the issue.^{ix}

The resignations of top military commanders

In the last week before the elections, resignations were submitted by Chief of General Staff of the Polish Army Gen. Rajmund Andrzejczak and Operational Commander Gen. Tomasz Piotrowski. They were accepted by President Andrzej Duda, who appointed their sucesors. However, the generals did not give reasons for their decision, but the most probably reason was the conflict with the Ministry of the National Defence Mariusz Błaszczak^x. In May 2023. Mariusz Blaszczak publicly accused the Operational Commander of negligence. The minister accused Gen. Piotrowski of failing to inform him of an incident on 16th of December, 2022, when a Russian missile violated Polish airspace (a Russian missile also flew through Polish airspace in December 2023). Blaszczak also resented that the search operation was not properly conducted. At the time, the minister suggested that Gen. Piotrowski should be dismissed, but such a decision was not made by President Andrzej Duda, on whom such a decision as head of the armed forces depended. Gen. Tomasz Piotrowski was also supported at the time by the head of the General Staff of the Polish Army, Gen. Rajmund Andrzejczak.

Discussion on EU reform

In November the subject of proposed changes to the European Union treaties aimed at deepening the federal nature of the Union is causing controversy in Poland. The plans have long been heavily criticized by the outgoing United Right government. However, enthusiasm for the

planned reform of the Union is also not shown by most of the opposition groups that will soon take power in Poland. The subject of the planned reform of the Union has provoked heated discussions in the Polish parliament.

Protest by Polish transporters and farmers on the Ukrainian border

A protest by Polish transporters and farmers at border crossings with Ukraine has been ongoing in Poland since early November. The protesters are blocking Ukrainian trucks from entering Poland, except for humanitarian aid and military equipment. They oppose unrestricted access of Ukrainian transport companies to the Polish and EU markets, which hits the Polish transport industry, which has about 40 percent of the EU market in this sector. According to the protesters, Ukrainian carriers do not meet EU standards and are thus more competitive. The farmers, in turn, are also demanding subsidies for the purchase of corn, the maintenance of the agricultural tax at this year's level and the continuation of so-called liquidity loans. These demands are related to the inflow of Ukrainian agricultural products to Poland. The protest has now been suspended.

Poland, along with Hungary and Slovakia, unilaterally extend embargo on Ukrainian grain

In September The European Commission has not extended the embargo on Ukrainian grain imports (wheat, corn, rapeseed and sunflower seeds) to Poland and 4 other countries - Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia, which was in effect until September 15. Following the decision, Poland, along with Hungary and Slovakia, introduced a unilateral ban on Ukrainian grain imports. Only the transit of Ukrainian grain through Poland is possible. Poland justifies this on the grounds of the interests of Polish agriculture and the drop in prices of agricultural products associated with imports. In response to the decision, Ukraine announced it would challenge Poland, Slovakia and Hungary in World Trade Organization (WTO) arbitration, but ultimately withdrew the application. ^{xi}

As a result of these events, the President of Ukraine, Vladimir Zelensky, stated that the policies of some countries (he did not mention Poland, but meant its actions) favored Putin. In turn, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki stated that Poland is not currently transferring any weapons to Ukraine because it is arming itself with the most modern weapons. It only fulfills previous obligations.

The US President Joe Biden in Poland

In February The US President Joe Biden visited Poland for the second time in a year. He arrived in Poland by train straight from Kyiv, where he met with President Volodymyr Zelenski, a few days before the anniversary of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Biden met in Poland with, among others, President Andrzej Duda, the leaders of NATO's Bucharest Nine, and the Polish people at a public meeting in Warsaw. During his visit, he confirmed the unity of NATO and the 'democratic world' in supporting Ukraine in its war against Russia and continued to support the country. He assured security guarantees for all NATO members. He emphasized the crucial role of Poland and the Polish-American strategic relationship in this effort. As the American leader stressed, the guarantees contained in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty are unquestionable and the United States remains the most important guarantor of security on the Old Continent.^{xii} In March Poznań has become home to the first permanent garrison of US troops in Poland, which will support other US units present in the country. In Poland, about 10,000 US troops are currently stationed, but the nature of their presence is not permanent. ^{xiii} In July, at the NATO Summit in Vilnius, important arrangements were made for Poland. The North Atlantic Alliance's new defense plans were approved for the first time since the Cold War, increasing security guarantees for NATO countries.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Poland

The topics of conversation during the official visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Poland and meetings with President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in April, among others, were security issues, economic cooperation, as well as historical issues. The countries' leaders also met with entrepreneurs, NGO leaders and Warsaw residents. The Ukrainian president thanked Poland for its support in the war against aggression of Russia. The Polish leaders, in turn, announced continued support and assistance to Ukraine and solicitation among other countries. Among other things, memoranda were signed during the visit on future cooperation in the reconstruction of Ukraine and in the defense sector. Warsaw was the first capital city in the world that the Ukrainian presidential couple has visited together since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The South Korean President to visit Poland

The President of the Republic of Korea Yoon Suk-Yeol has visited Poland in July. Among others, he met with President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. Three cooperation agreements were signed in the fields of trade and investment promotion, transport infrastructure development and cooperation in the reconstruction of Ukraine.^{xiv} The presidents took part in the Poland-Korea Economic Forum. South Korea is one of the largest investors in Poland. Among other things, it is involved in the construction of the Pątnów nuclear power plant, the construction of the Central Transport Port, and is a key supplier of military equipment to Poland.

The Weimar Triangle Summit and Poland's foreign policy priorities

In June The President Andrzej Duda, together with the French President Emmanuel Macron and the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, attended the Weimar Triangle Summit in Paris, during which the leaders expressed unity on further support for Ukraine in its war with Russia. A major topic of discussion was the prospect of Ukraine's membership of NATO and guarantees for the Ukraine, to be discussed at the Alliance's summit in Vilnius in July.

Conclusion

The past 2023 in Poland was marked by parliamentary elections, with issues of relations with the European Union and migration policy, as well as those concerning security policy, being important campaign themes. The assumption of power by a coalition of opposition parties led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk will mark a new opening in Polish European policy and an improvement in relations with Brussels and Berlin. With regard to relations with Ukraine, the United States or China, a continuation of the existing policy with a greater coordination element with EU structures is to be expected.

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- ii _____ "Do Rzeczy" weekly portal <https://dorzeczy.pl/unia-europejska/524544/zmiana-traktatow-ue-co-tusk-powiedzial-w-expose.html>
- iii _____ TVN24 TV Portal <https://tvn24.pl/polska/expose-donalda-tuska-co-powiedzial-o-ukrainie-reakcje-ukrainskich-mediow-7536801>
- iv _____ The Politico Portal <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-incoming-government-siemoniak-wont-cancel-pricey-defense-contracts-military-position/>
- v _____ The portal of the Financial Times newspaper <https://www.ft.com/content/a157b00f-e4c8-41e4-8a75-437b54b683d7>
- vi _____ The portal of TVN24 television <https://tvn24.pl/polska/afery-wizowa-o-co-chodzi-wizy-za-lapowki-dymisja-piotra-wawrzyka-sledztwo-prokuratury-i-cba-co-wiemy-7343190>
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- xi _____ The Daily Dziennik Gazeta Prawna <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/swiat/artykuly/9298120,komisja-europejska-nie-przedluzyla-embarga-na-ukrainskie-zboze-dla-pol.html>
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