

## **ELECTION BRIEFING NO 65 EUROPE AND THE OCTOBER 2011 POLISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION**

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### **Key points:**

- The election saw a clear victory for the centrist Civic Platform (PO), which thus became the first incumbent governing party to secure re-election for a second term of office since 1989, while the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party came a strong but fairly distant second.
- Although many Civic Platform supporters were disappointed with the party's slow progress in modernising the country, most voters saw it as the better guarantor of stability at a time of crisis and continued to harbour deeply ingrained concerns about the possible implications of Law and Justice returning to power.
- The Polish Peasant Party (PSL), Civic Platform's junior coalition partner, held on to its share of the vote, giving the governing coalition a small but workable majority.
- The Palikot Movement (RP), a new anti-clerical liberal party, emerged as the third largest grouping in the new Sejm, overtaking the once-powerful communist successor Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) which suffered its worst ever election defeat.
- Although the election coincided with Poland's first ever turn at the head of the rotating EU presidency, the two main parties focused mainly on domestic issues and treated Europe as a 'valence issue' where they competed over who was most competent to represent and advance Polish national interests within the EU; as well as an opportunity to highlight their different political styles and self-images.
- The re-elected government was likely to continue to function smoothly, although the imperative to introduce more radical reforms might force Civic Platform to threaten the interests of its partner's core rural-agricultural electorate and the election result gave it other coalition options.

### **Background/Context**

During the 2007-11 parliament the Polish political scene was very stable with support for the four main parties remaining fairly constant. The two parties that won the largest share of the

previous 2007 parliamentary election<sup>1</sup> remained dominant: the centrist Civic Platform (PO), the main governing party led by prime minister Donald Tusk, and the right-wing conservative Law and Justice party (PiS), the main opposition grouping led by Jarosław Kaczyński, Mr Tusk's predecessor as prime minister. However, Civic Platform retained a substantial lead and continued to enjoy the steady support of around 40-50% of the electorate. This was an extra-ordinarily high level of support for a governing party and nearly twice that recorded by Law and Justice, its closest rival which remained stuck at around 20-30%. Civic Platform even managed to emerge unscathed from a major lobbying and corruption scandal following allegations by the central anti-corruption bureau (CBA) in September 2009 that senior ministers and party leaders had acted covertly on behalf of the gambling industry to block legislation that would have increased betting taxes. Although the 'gambling affair' forced Mr Tusk to dismiss and side-line some of his closest aides, it had no apparent impact on the party's support.

This was a remarkable and unprecedented record in Polish politics which was more accustomed to the rise and disappearance of governing parties. Although the nature of popular support for the government was often very shallow, Mr Tusk's administration generally had more declared supporters than opponents, and throughout the period the prime minister remained one of Poland's most popular politicians. Polish voters clearly warmed to his apparently consensual style compared to that of Mr Kaczyński, his more combative predecessor. Civic Platform and Law and Justice thus had an apparent 'lock' on the Polish electorate and within that duopoly Mr Tusk's party appeared to have an in-built majority.

Opinion polls also showed the communist successor Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the smaller left-wing opposition grouping, third with around 10-15% support. The Alliance had previously been one of the strongest parties in Poland and governed from 1993-97 and 2001-5 but was in the doldrums since its support collapsed in the 2005 parliamentary election following its involvement in a series of spectacular high level corruption scandals.<sup>2</sup> National polls often showed the agrarian Polish Peasant Party (PSL), Civic Platform's junior coalition partner in government, struggling to secure the 5% vote share required to obtain parliamentary representation. However, the party more than held its own in the October-November 2010 regional assembly elections when it came third with over 16% of the vote nationally.

The Civic Platform-Peasant Party coalition was much more cohesive than most of its predecessors; indeed, this was probably one of the most stable governments in post-1989 Poland. The key to its stability was the political partnership between Mr Tusk and Peasant Party leader Waldemar Pawlak, who held the office of deputy prime minister and economy minister. The two leaders were generally able to defuse tensions and problematic issues before they became too contentious or escalated into major public disputes. This was helped by the fact that the Peasant Party was primarily an office-seeking party with a clearly defined rural-agricultural electoral constituency, making it a pragmatic negotiating partner with a fairly narrow policy agenda. Importantly, the fact that the two parties had somewhat different core electorates and bases of support, with the Civic Platform primarily an urban party and

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<sup>1</sup> See: Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Europe and the October 2007 Polish Parliamentary Election', *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Election Briefing No 37* at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern-election-briefing-no-37.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See: Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Europe and the September/October 2005 Polish Presidential and Parliamentary Election,' *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Election Briefing No 22* at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern-election-briefing-no-22.pdf>.

the Peasant Party's voters drawn mainly from rural communities, meant that they were not in direct competition for the same voters. The Peasant Party also appeared to have drawn lessons from earlier periods as a member of coalition governments during the 1990s and early 2000s when it was a very difficult partner and distanced itself very publicly from the main ruling party whenever its poll ratings declined or the government encountered difficulties. This was particularly true when the party was defending the interests of its core rural-agricultural constituency. However, this time around Mr Pawlak's party pursued a very different strategy: making a virtue of its predictability and self-consciously trying to project an image as a constructive and moderating force in Polish politics. At the same time, it concentrated on 'delivering' for its core rural-agricultural electorate both in terms of policy - by, for example, protecting the heavily state-subsidised social security system for farmers (KRUS) - and through its control of government-appointed posts and agencies, especially in the agricultural sector. As long as Civic Platform was careful not to push ahead too quickly with policy reforms that threatened to undermine the interests of the Peasant Party's core farming constituency, or on other issues where it felt that it might not have been able to count on its partner's support, then the coalition functioned smoothly.

Nonetheless, Civic Platform's support was shallow and not based on any particular enthusiasm for the government or its policies. For sure, Mr Tusk's administration was generally felt to have done a competent job and it took credit for ensuring that Poland was the only EU member that came through the first wave of the global financial crisis in 2008-9 without falling into recession. However, although Civic Platform had made a bold campaign pledge in the 2007 election that it would deliver an 'economic miracle', fearing the political consequences Mr Tusk's government failed to capitalise on its electoral mandate and move ahead quickly with the more radical social and economic policy reforms that were advocated by many analysts as necessary for the party to live up to its election promises. As a consequence, the government was heavily criticised, even by its own supporters, for its lack of major achievements and ambition. This led to a steady erosion in the government's public approval ratings and satisfaction with its performance, particularly evaluations of its handling of the economy.

In its defence, the government's supporters argued that, initially at least, it was hugely constrained by the fact that it had to 'co-habit' with President Lech Kaczyński, the Law and Justice party leader's twin brother. Given his very close links with Law and Justice, Mr Kaczyński quickly emerged as a natural focus for opposition and found himself in a perpetual and debilitating conflict with the government. Although he had few executive prerogatives, Mr Kaczyński could veto legislation and on a number of occasions refused to sign key elements of the government's programme. The government lacked the three-fifths parliamentary majority in the Sejm, the more powerful lower house of parliament, required to over-turn the presidential veto, and therefore needed the support of the Democratic Left Alliance in key votes to secure it. This became more difficult when, at the party's June 2008 congress, Grzegorz Napieralski defeated the incumbent Wojciech Olejniczak in a close and divisive contest for the party leadership. While Mr Olejniczak, along with most of the party's best known leaders, had favoured co-operating with the government against Law and Justice, Mr Napieralski adopted a new political strategy based on making fewer concessions to, and distancing his party from, the Tusk administration.

However, in April 2010 President Kaczyński and 95 others, including many senior Polish officials and public figures, died in a plane crash at Smolensk in western Russia on their way to a memorial service honouring the thousands of Polish officers killed by the Soviet NKVD

secret police in the Katyn forest in 1940. Mr Kaczyński's untimely death and the subsequent election of Bronisław Komorowski, a Civic Platform nominee, as President in July 2010<sup>3</sup> removed an important constitutional obstacle to the implementation of the government's programme and left Mr Tusk's party controlling all the main organs of state power. Nonetheless, with a parliamentary election scheduled for autumn 2011, the government still remained instinctively cautious of introducing radical reforms that might alienate voters. The Peasant Party's presence as a junior coalition partner also acted as a block on the introduction of certain reforms, particularly any attempts to radically overhaul the KRUS social security system for farmers. However, Civic Platform's reluctance to accelerate reforms was also part of its broader governing philosophy which tried to turn programmatic timidity and ideological eclecticism into a virtue. Civic Platform's strategy of 'reform by small steps' was integral to its long-term strategy of transforming itself from an economically liberal and socially conservative centre-right party into a non-ideological and all-inclusive centrist grouping that was attractive to a very wide spectrum of voters (what some critics dubbed a 'post-political party of power').

In fact, rather than any particular enthusiasm for Mr Tusk's government or its programme, Civic Platform's greatest electoral asset was the public's continued aversion to the turbulent and often emotionally charged style of politics that most Poles associated with the 2005-7 Law and Justice-led governments and Jarosław Kaczyński in particular. Even the government's supporters often defended the Tusk administration on the grounds that its main achievement was to restore social harmony and, for all his alleged indecisiveness, Polish voters seemed to prefer Mr Tusk's apparently more consensual style of politics. Law and Justice found it increasingly (and frustratingly) difficult to break this logic. The party did make various attempts to present a more conciliatory image and focus on 'bread and butter' economic issues and modernising Poland, pushing its traditional themes (such as fighting crime and corruption, and making a more fundamental break with the communist past) into the background. But most of the time these efforts had little impact on the party's fortunes. The only period when Law and Justice appeared to be narrowing Civic Platform's opinion poll lead was in the run up to the June-July 2010 presidential election that followed the Smolensk tragedy. Running an extremely effective and sure-footed campaign directed by politicians from the party's moderate wing, Mr Kaczyński used the snap election as an opportunity to re-invent his party by softening its rhetoric and reaching out to centrist voters. In the event, by winning 36.5% in the first round (compared to 41.5% for Mr Komorowski) Mr Kaczyński managed to force a second round run-off, which he lost but with a respectable 47% of the votes.

However, almost as soon as the election results were announced Mr Kaczyński quickly abandoned the more moderate and consensual tone that he adopted during the presidential campaign and returned to his earlier confrontational style. Disassociating himself from the moderates who had run his presidential campaign, the Law and Justice leader launched a series of bitter attacks on the ruling party and refused to co-operate with the newly elected President, describing his election as a 'misunderstanding' and symbolically boycotting his inauguration. Mr Kaczyński also started to make the Smolensk air crash and subsequent investigation into its causes a central issue for the party, saying that the government bore 'moral and political responsibility' for the errors that led to the tragedy through its relentless attacks on his brother and lack of care for his security. He also accused the prime minister of

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<sup>3</sup> See: Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Europe and the June/July 2010 Polish Presidential Election', *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Election Briefing No 55* at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern-election-briefing-no-55.pdf>.

weakness and naively playing into the Russian's hands by allowing Moscow to oversee the main crash investigation.

Mr Kaczyński's inflammatory rhetoric and focus on Smolensk squandered the political capital that the party had accumulated during the presidential election. His uncompromising stance may have buttressed support for Law and Justice among its core supporters. However, as the party's disappointing showing in the autumn 2010 local elections (when it failed to win control of any of Poland's 16 regional authorities) showed, over-doing the aggressive language and using the Smolensk tragedy as a political weapon prevented Law and Justice from offering a coherent alternative to Civic Platform and eroded support for the party among more moderate voters. Indeed, Mr Kaczyński's post-election *volte face* forced a group of leading Law and Justice moderates led by Joanna Kluzik-Rostkowska (who had been his presidential campaign manager) to break away from the party and, in November 2010, form a new centre-right grouping called 'Poland is the Most Important' (PJI - which was Mr Kaczynski's presidential campaign slogan).

## The Campaign

At the start of the campaign, the only questions thus appeared to be about the extent of Civic Platform's victory, whether or not its junior coalition partner would be able to cross the 5% threshold, and if Mr Tusk's party would need to find new or additional coalition partners to govern? Civic Platform began the election by holding a successful national convention at which party members, led by Mr Tusk, debated the party's activities since its formation in 2001 and drew up a balance sheet of the its four years in government. The ruling party's campaign was based on setting out a general vision for the evolutionary reform and modernisation of Poland aimed at making the country a strong player within Europe. Mr Tusk's party tried to take credit for Poland's relatively strong economic performance, arguing that it was in large part due to various government measures that Poland remained a 'green island of growth' within Europe. At a time of increasing economic uncertainty, they argued, Poles should choose a safe and competent team that had at least started the process of modernisation and investment in the country's future prosperity and development; exemplified by the party's cautious initial campaign slogan 'Poland Under Construction'.

Civic Platform also used its tenth-anniversary convention to highlight that it was winning over new converts from rival parties, as well-known figures from across the political spectrum switched allegiance and declared their intention to run on Civic Platform's candidate lists. Thus, one of the convention highlights was a speech by Mrs Kluzik-Rostkowska, perhaps the most controversial of the 'switchers', where she declared that she would be leaving Poland is the Most Important to support Civic Platform. At the other end of the political spectrum, the convention also saw the accession to the party of well-known centre-left politicians, following the earlier defection to Civic Platform of Bartosz Arłukowicz, one of the most high profile and popular left-wing figures linked to the Democratic Left Alliance. Mr Arłukowicz - who, ironically, first gained national prominence due to his high profile role in a special parliamentary commission set up to investigate the so-called 'gambling affair' - joined the government as the prime minister's plenipotentiary for contact with the 'socially excluded'; a ministerial position created especially for him. These defections were part of a concerted long-term strategy designed to broaden Civic Platform's appeal and trying to neutralise and weaken its political opponents by co-opting some of their best known politicians and authority figures. In his keynote party convention address, Mr

Tusk stressed that he saw the presence of such a wide range of views and opposing opinions within Civic Platform as one of its strengths.

Much of the summer campaigning was dominated by the so-called 'debate about debates' which started when Mr Tusk challenged Mr Kaczyński and senior Law and Justice politicians to take part in a series of televised confrontations with Civic Platform's incumbent ministers. Mr Tusk wanted to highlight Law and Justice's lack of experienced, high quality specialists who could handle the top jobs of running the country, given that Mr Kaczyński's party lost many of its most talented and experienced members in the Smolensk crash. The Civic Platform leader also tried to capitalise on the fact that he was a much more accomplished TV debater than Mr Kaczyński. Mr Tusk out-performed the Law and Justice leader in their last debate before the 2007 election, which was widely considered to be a turning point in that campaign, and this made Mr Kaczyński extremely wary of participating in such forums alongside the Civic Platform leader. Mr Kaczyński therefore insisted on a series of terms and conditions that he knew the Civic Platform leader would never accept (stipulating that the debates be held in the Law and Justice party headquarters) or were un-measurable (announcing that he would only debate when the prime minister agreed to 'lower the white flag', implying that he had been insufficiently robust in both confronting vested interests at home and defending Poland's interests abroad).

Initially, it seemed that Law and Justice's refusal to debate with Civic Platform would lose the party support by making it appear weak and unprofessional. However, this was not the case and, as the campaign progressed, it became an increasingly tight race. Mr Kaczyński's strategy of embarking on a nationwide speaking tour instead of participating in televised debates appeared to work, while Civic Platform, having originally expected to cruise to victory, found itself increasingly on the defensive and struggling to develop a clear campaign message. Moreover, although Mr Kaczyński's campaign speeches could be quite sharp in tone, once again Law and Justice tried to moderate its more abrasive rhetoric. Knowing it had little scope to win over many voters beyond its core, the party concentrated instead on running a 'softer and gentler' campaign aimed at de-mobilising those Civic Platform voters who were motivated primarily by fear of Mr Kaczyński. Mr Kaczyński also avoided focusing too much on the Smolensk air crash which party strategists knew was not a major concern to voters beyond its core electorate and gave the impression that the party was backward looking and obsessed with a single issue. At the same time, they knew that the party could rely upon the 'below the radar' support of the many civil society initiatives that arose among those who were still fired up by the relentless search for the culprits behind the Smolensk tragedy. Although it was not part of the official campaign, the Smolensk issue thus consolidated and mobilised the party's most committed supporters, which it knew could be very significant in the event of a low turnout.

In its official campaign, however, Law and Justice attempted to construct a broader appeal by concentrating on issues such as: unemployment, health care, opportunities for young people, and the poor state of Poland's infrastructure. Mr Kaczyński's party seized on the fact that many Poles felt that, even taking the economic crisis into account, Mr Tusk's government had not delivered the increase in opportunities that it had promised in 2007, a message exemplified by its main campaign slogan 'Poland Deserves More'. Indeed, one of the leitmotifs of the Law and Justice campaign became a question posed by pepper farmer Stanisław Kowalczyk who spoiled what was meant to be a routine campaign visit for Mr Tusk. In front of live TV cameras, Mr Kowalczyk complained about how he and other farmers had not received any help from the government after heavy gales had devastated

farms in his region and asked in an emotional voice: ‘How do I live now Mr prime minister, how do I live?’ The line was quickly picked up by Mr Kaczyński’s party and Mr Kowalczyk was invited to speak at a Law and Justice election convention. Interestingly, Law and Justice also made a particularly strong pitch to younger voters, who were crucial in getting Civic Platform elected in 2007. Law and Justice correctly identified a ‘glass ceiling’ that many young Poles, especially those from smaller towns and rural areas, felt that they encountered and the fact that, in spite of economic growth, Poland still had high levels of youth unemployment and even many of those who managed to get a job struggled to obtain (much less pay) mortgages and support their families. This included a high profile campaign poster featuring a number of its younger female candidates with the strap-line: ‘Come with us!’ which contrasted strongly with the (generally middle aged and greying) men who featured in many of the Civic Platform campaign adverts.

For its part, Civic Platform knew that it could not concentrate solely on its relatively modest achievements in office. Although it came up with a rather defensive slogan for the final stage of the campaign (‘We will do more’), the party also developed a strong counter-offensive. Firstly, it drew upon Mr Tusk, perhaps the party’s single greatest electoral asset and certainly its most effective campaigner, who undertook a nationwide tour on the so-called ‘Tuskobus’. The road show of semi-planned encounters, speeches, interviews and press conferences ensured continual media coverage as the Civic Platform leader visited poorer towns and was seen to listen to ordinary voters’ concerns and complaints. Mr Tusk also showed that he was not afraid to face down angry anti-government football supporters who regularly attacked him for what they claimed was his administration’s excessively authoritarian crackdown on hooliganism.

Secondly, in the final stages of the campaign Civic Platform significantly ratcheted up its anti-Law and Justice rhetoric. For example, it released an extremely powerful campaign advert showing scuffles between a group who protested against the removal of a cross that was erected in front of the Presidential Palace after the Smolensk tragedy and the authorities, together with violent scenes involving football hooligans. The so-called ‘defenders of the cross’ were associated with the Mr Kaczyński’s party and some Law and Justice leaders had also expressed sympathy for known football hooligans defending them as ‘patriots’. The advert ended with the phrase, ‘They are going to vote, what about you?’ implying that a Law and Justice victory would hand Poland over to the kind of people depicted in the film. Civic Platform’s efforts to mobilise its more passive supporters were also helped by a controversial book-length interview with Mr Kaczyński published towards the end of the election. Here the Law and Justice leader said that German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s ascent to power did not happen ‘by chance alone’ and suggested that she was trying to re-build German imperial power. Law and Justice was thus forced to spend much of the last week of the campaign trying to explain what exactly Mr Kaczyński meant to say and responding to claims that the party was playing on anti-German sentiments.

## **Results**

As Table 1 shows, the election saw a clear victory for Civic Platform, which thus became the first incumbent governing party to secure re-election for a second term of office since the fall of communism in 1989. Although most commentators expected the party to win, it did so by a larger than expected margin garnering 39.18% of the vote while Law and Justice came a

strong but fairly distant second with 29.89%. As a result, Mr Tusk's party won 207 seats in the 460-member Sejm, compared with 157 for Law and Justice.

**Table 1: October 2011 Polish parliamentary election results to the Sejm**

	2007		2011		% Change
	%	Seats	%	Seats	
Civic Platform (PO)	41.51	209	39.18	207	-2.33
Law and Justice (PiS)	32.11	166	29.89	157	-2.22
Palikot Movement (RP)			10.02	40	+10.02
Polish Peasant Party (PSL)	8.91	31	8.36	28	-0.55
Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)*	13.15	53	8.24	27	-4.91
Polish is the Most Important (PjN)			2.19		+2.19
New Right (NP)			1.06		+1.06
Polish Labour Party (PPP)	1.00		0.55		-0.45

Source: Polish State Electoral Commission (<http://www.pkw.gov.pl/>)

\* In 2007, the party contested the election as part of the 'Left and Democrats' (LiD) coalition with Polish Social Democracy (SdPI) and the Democrats (Demokracy).

Civic Platform's victory was due, in part, to its ability to craft an extremely broad appeal and identify itself skilfully with mainstream public opinion. However, given that the size of the two main parties 'core' electorates was roughly similar, one of the main factors determining the election outcome was always likely to be the level of turnout. Many observers felt that a lower turnout would benefit Law and Justice whose core supporters were more highly motivated and easier to mobilise than Civic Platform's less disciplined voters. The latter had turned out in large numbers in 2007 mainly because they disliked Mr Kaczyński's confrontational style of politics, so the key to Civic Platform's victory would be its ability to generate fear about the possible consequences of Law and Justice returning to power. The election result suggested that although many of the party's supporters were disappointed with its slow progress in modernising the country, most voters clearly viewed Civic Platform as the better guarantor of stability at a time of crisis and continued to harbour deeply ingrained concerns about Law and Justice. Memories of Mr Kaczyński's previous period in office were evidently still fresh enough to mobilise these disillusioned Civic Platform voters. Moreover, Mr Kaczyński's mistakes during the final stages of the campaign, such as his comments about Mrs Merkel, provided Mr Tusk's party with the ammunition that it needed for an effective counter-mobilisation of its more passive supporters. In the event, at 48.92% the level of turnout in 2011 was around the norm for much of the 1990s and early 2000s (although down from 53.88% in 2007) which meant that enough Civic Platform supporters came out to vote to give Mr Tusk's party its historic second victory by a very clear margin. In other words, if the 2007 election was a referendum on the out-going Law and Justice government then the 2011 poll turned into one on whether the main opposition party offered a credible alternative to Mr Tusk's administration, and most voters felt that it did not.

As Table 1 also shows, the Peasant Party won 8.36% of the vote, finishing fourth among the five parties that crossed the 5% threshold, and 28 seats in the new Sejm. This gave the governing coalition 235 seats in total, enough to secure a small but workable parliamentary majority. Although some party leaders had hoped for more, this was a relatively good result for the agrarian party given that many opinion polls during the campaign (and, indeed, previous parliament) showed its support hovering around the 5% mark, and it was the first time that party had managed to hold on to its share of the vote after a period in office. Given that it had the most developed grassroots organisation of any Polish party much of its



campaigning took place at the local level and was often not picked up by the national media; as a consequence of which opinion polls often tended to under-state the party's actual level of support.

Apart from the re-election of Mr Tusk's government, the other major story of this election was the success of the Palikot Movement (RP), an anti-clerical liberal party formed less than a year ago by the controversial and flamboyant businessman and former Civic Platform deputy Janusz Palikot. As Table 1 shows, the Palikot Movement ended up winning just over 10% of the vote, which translated into 40 seats making it the third largest grouping in the new Sejm, overtaking the longer-established Peasant Party and the once-powerful Democratic Left Alliance. With his radical and outspoken attacks on the Law and Justice party, Mr Palikot had previously been a useful outrider for Civic Platform. However, after the Smolensk tragedy he started to become a liability when he blamed the crash on the irresponsibility of the Kaczyński brothers and claimed that the late President may have been under the influence of alcohol during the ill-fated flight (earlier he had accused Mr Kaczyński of being an alcoholic). At the end of 2010, Mr Palikot left Civic Platform complaining at what he saw as its conservative tilt and formed his own group with a socially liberal programme that included reducing the influence of Poland's powerful Catholic Church in public life, the de-criminalisation of so-called 'soft' drugs, abortion on demand, and more rights for sexual and other minorities including the legalisation of same-sex civil unions.

Until the final stages of the election support for the Palikot Movement stood at a mere 1-3%. However, Mr Palikot ran a dynamic, clearly targeted and extremely well executed campaign trying to move beyond his frivolous image and present himself as a serious political leader and intellectual. Knowing that the impact of his original anti-clerical appeal was likely to be limited, Mr Palikot began to place greater emphasis upon his broader message of business-friendly, small-state social liberalism, promising to bring about a 'modern, secular, socially oriented, civic and friendly' state. The Palikot Movement thereby attracted a significant number of younger voters who wanted efficient government but also had socially liberal views on lifestyle issues and felt that Civic Platform and the Democratic Left Alliance were too establishment-oriented and deferential towards the Catholic Church.

The success of Mr Palikot's 'new left' was achieved in large part at the expense of the Democratic Left Alliance, whose campaign lacked the Palikot Movement's energy and vigour and failed to develop a distinctive and coherent message. Previously the dominant party on the Polish centre-left, as Table 1 shows, the Alliance suffered its worst ever election defeat, finishing a distant fifth with only 8.24% of the vote and 27 seats. The result was a huge disappointment for the party and prompted Mr Napieralski to announce that he would stand down as leader at a special congress in December. Only a year earlier, Mr Napieralski ran a surprisingly vigorous presidential election campaign to finish an impressive third with a much better than expected 13.7% of the vote. This appeared to establish the Democratic Left Alliance as the dominant force on the Polish left and Mr Napieralski as its unquestioned party leader. However, this proved to be a false dawn and the party lost ground as it struggled to find an effective response to the series of high profile defections to Civic Platform by prominent left-wing politicians such as Mr Arłukowicz. Mr Napieralski became too self-confident after his surprisingly good presidential election result and, as a consequence, when drawing up the party's election candidate lists paid too much attention to internal party manoeuvring rather choosing candidates who could attract broad support.

## The impact of Europe

The election coincided with Poland's first ever turn at the head of the rotating presidency of the EU so it was inevitable that Europe would play a role in this campaign. Civic Platform hoped to use the timing of the presidency to boost its electoral chances by providing Mr Tusk and other ministers with a major European and global platform. However, the almost daily dose of negative news from the euro zone meant that the Polish presidency became dominated by the EU crisis and Mr Tusk's government was frustrated by Poland's exclusion from many of the key European debates because it was not a euro zone member. This made the EU presidency less of an electoral asset than Civic Platform had originally hoped for.

Mr Tusk's government had made ensuring that Poland was seen as a predictable and reliable EU member one of the hallmarks of its foreign policy and clear point of differentiation between itself and its Law and Justice-led predecessor. When it came to power in 2007, the new Civic Platform-led government made a concerted effort to re-focus Polish foreign policy in a pro-EU direction and change the country's image as a 'trouble-maker' on European issues. It also adopted a more conciliatory tone towards Brussels and the major EU states, paying special attention to improving strained relations with Germany, with whom the Law and Justice-led government had clashed bitterly. Indeed, some commentators suggested that Civic Platform's 2007 election victory represented Poland's 'second return to Europe'.

In fact, during this election the two main parties focused mainly on domestic issues and when they did campaign on Europe treated it as a so-called 'valence issue' where they competed over who was most competent to pursue a shared objective; in this case, representing and advancing Polish 'national interests' most effectively within the EU. Civic Platform argued that it, in adopting a positive and constructive approach with Warsaw's main EU allies, it had located Poland within the so-called 'European mainstream', thus increasing the country's role in the EU decision making process. This, they claimed, stood in favourable contrast to the period of Law and Justice government when Poland became isolated and unable to forge stable long-term alliances. In particular, the party tried to use Civic Platform politicians who held prominent positions within European institutions - notably European Parliament (EP) President Jerzy Buzek and European Commissioner Janusz Lewandowski - as way of convincing Poles that it was the party best placed to fight Poland's corner in negotiations on the 2014-20 EU budget. This caused some controversy given that Mr Lewandowski was meant to be an impartial official at the centre of the Commission's work on the budget.

Law and Justice, on the other hand, fiercely criticised Mr Tusk's government for 'hauling up the white flag of surrender', accusing it of insufficient robustness in defending Poland within the EU and relying too much upon Germany whose interests, they argued, often conflicted with Warsaw's. Mr Kaczyński's party said that identifying Poland with the 'European mainstream' was nothing to boast about. Any government that agreed to everything that Brussels and the main EU states proposed would inevitably win plaudits for its 'constructive' approach but, like Mr Tusk's administration, have little concrete to show for it. While the Law and Justice-led governments' approach may, at times, have annoyed Brussels and Poland's EU partners, this was an inevitable price to pay for standing up robustly in defence of Poland's national interests and had proved a more effective means of extracting concessions.

Differences between the two main parties over approaches to Europe were also a question of different political styles and self-images, and the images that they attempted to portray of

their political opponents. On the one hand, Civic Platform tried to present its European policy within the context of a broader self-image as a pragmatic and pro-Western modernising force compared with Law and Justice which, it argued, represented backward, provincial nationalism. Law and Justice, on the other hand, tried to locate the party's approach to European integration as part of its self-image as a patriotic party determined to stand up to the major EU states in order to advance Polish interests. The party also presented itself as a staunch defender of Polish cultural identity and Catholic religious values that was prepared to clash with the West European left-liberal political and media establishment and cultural elites in order to ensure that the EU respected these traditional values.

Among the other parties, the Democratic Left Alliance tried to make Europe an election issue, even publishing a separate foreign policy document as part of its election programme. At one point, the party highlighted the fact that it was a Democratic Left Alliance-led government that had negotiated Poland's EU membership and signed the accession treaty in the early 2000s. It also criticised the Civic Platform-led government for failing to sign up to the EU charter of fundamental rights (a concession made to Law and Justice and President Kaczynski, who negotiated an opt-out for Poland as part of the Lisbon treaty, in order to secure its ratification in the previous parliament) and pursuing adoption of the euro with insufficient vigour. In spite of the turbulence in the euro zone, as part of its commitment to be seen to be at the centre of the EU's decision-making core, the Tusk government remained committed to Poland joining the euro, but as a long-term strategic goal rather than short-term priority.

Finally, one of the striking features of this election, compared to many of those held in Poland during the previous decade, was the electoral marginalisation (indeed, almost total absence) of parties that were hostile to, or extremely critical of, European integration. The only real exceptions were two small radical Eurosceptic groupings: the Polish Right (PR) party, a right-wing conservative Catholic breakaway from Law and Justice led by former Sejm speaker Marek Jurek; and the New Right (NP) grouping led by the maverick radical economic libertarian-social conservative Janusz Korwin-Mikke. However, these two parties failed to gather enough signatures to register nationwide candidate lists and none of the seven parties that did expressed any fundamental hostility towards the European integration project. The only major party that was critical of the EU was Law and Justice which, in rhetorical terms at least, maintained a broad ideological commitment to a more 'Gaullist' inter-governmental approach to integration. However, the party's support for policies such as a large EU budget and fiscal transfers between richer and poorer states meant that its 'ideological' preference for inter-governmentalism often gave way in practice to support for the 'community method' and supranational institutions like the European Commission that shared these priorities.

## **Future Prospects**

Civic Platform emerged from the election with a historically unprecedented renewed mandate and supportive presidency held by a party nominee who was extremely unlikely to act as any kind of constitutional impediment to its legislative programme. The ruling party also had the luxury of not having to contest any national elections until the next EP poll scheduled for June 2014. Moreover, Mr Tusk emerged greatly strengthened within his own party and - having announced during the election campaign that, if re-elected, this would be his final

term as prime minister - with an incentive to look beyond short-term electoral considerations and build his political legacy by tackling more difficult issues.

Although the election results opened up various possibilities for Civic Platform, the party decided to continue with current governing coalition with the Peasant Party. Mr Palikot was a maverick and his party an unstable construct that contained many new deputies who were not widely known and had no previous parliamentary experience. Although Mr Tusk hoped to solicit the Movement's informal support on a number of specific issues, such as de-regulation of the economy, he avoided making any formal agreements with its unpredictable leader. In the longer term, there was also a chance that Civic Platform would try and pick up individual defectors from the Palikot Movement, particularly among the generally pragmatic and non-ideological local entrepreneurs who were elected on the party's ticket and likely to orientate towards whoever was the 'party of power'.

The re-elected Civic Platform-Peasant Party coalition was likely to continue to function smoothly as long as Mr Tusk's party did not threaten the interests of its partner's core electorate. However, the coalition had never faced a really severe governing crisis in the previous parliament and it was difficult to predict how the partners would behave if the government came under more intense pressure. The increasingly gloomy economic outlook and ongoing euro zone crisis increased the pressure upon Mr Tusk to undertake the kind of drastic and politically difficult fiscal measures advocated by many analysts as necessary to put the country's public finances in order. There was also a much greater expectation that Civic Platform would finally deliver on the reform and modernisation package that it promised in 2007 but, at best, only succeeded in partly implementing. There was a danger that this would put the unity of the government under much greater strain particularly if Mr Tusk's party started to by-pass its coalition partner and appeal directly to the Palikot Movement and Democratic Left Alliance in order to win parliamentary votes.

In fact, amid growing worries about the potential impact on Poland of the euro zone's continuing sovereign debt crisis, in his policy speech setting out the re-elected coalition's priorities for the next four years Mr Tusk indicated that the re-elected government would embark upon more decisive policies. The prime minister announced a series of far-reaching initiatives and austerity measures designed to improve Poland's finances and protect the country from the global financial crisis. These fiscal policy and pension reform measures were aimed as much at re-assuring the financial markets, credit agencies and the EU that the new government was making a serious effort to speed up structural reforms, as they were at Polish citizens and voters. Controversially from the perspective of Peasant Party, they included pledges to phase out special pension arrangements for Polish farmers and bring them into the normal social security and tax systems; measures that, if fully implemented, threatened to undermine the governing coalition's stability and cohesion.

Mr Tusk's speech contained virtually no references to Poland's European policy nor, indeed, foreign policy more generally. However, very shortly afterwards foreign minister Radosław Sikorski ignited a lively debate on Poland's approach to the European integration when he made a major speech in Berlin calling for the EU to evolve in the direction of a German-led federation; a move that provoked a fierce negative reaction from the right-wing opposition. The fact that Mr Sikorski's speech was quickly followed up by a European Council summit that agreed to begin negotiations on a new inter-governmental treaty on fiscal stability involving all the current EU members except for the UK, meant that the European issue looked set to remain high on the political agenda in Poland.

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