

From **Corinne Deloy**
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7 days before
the pool

In office at present, Civic Platform (PO) maintains its lead in the polls even though the gap between Law and Justice (PiS) is narrowing.

On 9th October more than 30 million Poles will be renewing the two chambers of the Parliament: the Diet (Sejm), and the Senate (Senat). The polls are anticipating victory for the Civic Platform, outgoing Prime Minister, Donald Tusk's party. The gap between it and its main rival, Jaroslaw Kaczynski's, Law and Justice Party, has been narrowing over the last few weeks. The party in office is not due to win an absolute majority alone and will therefore have to form a government coalition. It may choose to continue working with the People's Party or possibly turn to the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), and even if it seems difficult to imagine, it may form a partnership with Law and Justice (PiS).

The electoral campaign has extended beyond Poland's borders. Hence on 7th September the Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski (PO) travelled to London and Dublin, where many Poles live. Likewise Prime Minister Donald Tusk visited Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, a neighbouring country that also has a large Polish minority. Law and Justice (PiS) has not been left behind in this and is also campaigning in the UK.

Civic Platform is trying to frighten voters by highlighting the dangers that a return to power by the PiS would represent for Poland. "Eurosceptic, inward-looking opposition, which prefers drama and tragedy to success, may bring the present public investment policy and to a halt and undermine Poland's European base by challenging Warsaw's position with regard to the EU" declared the Prime Minister adding, "Without even realising it our opponents can ruin all of the work we have done." Moreover Donald Tusk has challenged his rival, Jaroslaw Kaczynski on several occasions, accusing him of cowardice because he refuses to take part in pre-electoral debates offered by the television channels.

Civic Platform, which has chosen the slogan, "We shall do better" (in response to Law and Justice's declaration "The Poles deserve better"), knows that it promised a great deal four years ago and that it has less to offer than in 2007. It is relying on the middle classes, which understand that the country has succeeded in resisting the international economic crisis, better than any other

state in Europe. Since 1990 Warsaw has more than tripled its GDP/capita which lies at €13,808. "Contrary to the other parties the Civic Platform has used the economic crisis to increase its electorate. It has also been helped by the PiS which is a good opponent, since many people support the PO because they fear that the PiS will get back into government," indicates Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski, a political expert at the Collegium Civitas, University of Warsaw.

"There have been a few mistakes but most Poles are satisfied," says Pawel Swieboda, director of the think-tank, Demos Europe, adding "voters want things to continue, they want stability and an improvement in their living standards." However the desire for consensus and to receive partners within its midst, who often have very different opinions, sometimes weakens the PO's position. Moreover the party absolutely has to motivate the undecided; low turnout would indeed be to its disadvantage, since the PiS's electorate is traditionally highly motivated.

From an economic point of view the outgoing Prime

Minister's party is promising a reduction in VAT as of 2014; a rise in civil servants' salaries and a reduction of the public debt down to 48% of the GDP in 2015 and 40% three years later. The PO hopes to continue its privatisation programme, introduce competition into the healthcare system and improve the country's education system. It is suggesting that Poland adopts the single currency once the present crisis in the euro zone is over. However the outgoing head of government is not planning on tax reductions within the next two years. "Whoever says that a reduction in taxes is possible in the near future and that this is important for Poland is either a liar or a fool. To stay afloat in times of turbulence Poland must not take radical measures. If we want to guarantee the regular payment of retirement pensions and social aid we cannot run the risk of reducing our budget. Today we need a great amount of discipline and a little bit of patience," declared the outgoing Prime Minister adding, "Poland cannot start to waver as Greece has been doing".

"I am standing to win and I hope to undertake a second term in office. I want to be re-elected because I want to be Prime Minister in these difficult times;" declared Donald Tusk on 25th September, adding "victory in 2011 will probably be more important than the one in 2007 because Poland has a further opportunity to benefit from European funds to complete its modernisation and because the world situation is more complex. The challenge is major; as a result we hope to win with an even greater margin."

"For the first time since the end of communism in 1989 a government has a chance of being re-elected," stresses Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski.

Law and Justice (PiS) hopes to limit the privatisations and bring large companies – such as PKN Orlen, Grupa Lotos, PZU, KGHM Polska Miedz and PGNiG – under State control. The party is only contemplating the adoption of the euro once the markets are over the financial crisis, after a referendum and when Poland has reached the socio-economic levels of the most developed countries, i.e. in 15 to 20 years. The PiS hopes to tax the banks and is not excluding an increase in taxes on the wealthiest Poles. Finally, Jaroslaw Kaczynski supports an increase in the minimum salary by half of the present average salary, i.e. 3,612 zlotys/month (819 €).

The PiS is finding it hard to justify the absence of its leader in the pre-electoral TV debates. The latter has declared that he did not want to debate with political leaders and accuses the journalists, who question

the candidates, of not be competent enough. Jaroslaw Kaczynski certainly remembers his "defeat" in the TV debate against Donald Tusk during the electoral campaign of 21st October 2007. He also finds it hard to find people in his entourage who are able to take part in a debate on economic issues. Zyta Gilowska, former Finance Minister in the government led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski in 2006-2007 and member of the Monetary Policy Council since February 2010, cannot join in the electoral campaign. Finally the PiS is struggling to appoint people who might occupy the various ministries in a government it would lead, if it won. The party lost several of its most eminent members in the plane crash on 10th April 2010 in Petchorsk in the region of Smolensk (Russia) which cost the life of the President of the Republic Lech Kaczynski (PiS), Jaroslaw's twin brother, and 95 other people in the presidential delegation, who were travelling to Katyn to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the execution of 22,000 Polish officers by the Soviet secret police.

Others, who left the PiS for a time, such as former Culture Minister (2005-2007) Kazimierz Michal Ujazdowski, and former leader of the Diet (April-November 2007), Ludwik Dorn, joined it again but Jaroslaw Kaczynski no longer trusts them. Zbigniew Ziobro, often seen as the successor to Jaroslaw Kaczynski as head of the party, has been quoted as being the next Justice Minister (he already occupied this office between 2005 and 2007) but he is possibly more interested in the position of MEP and seems distant from the Polish political scene. Anna Fotyga and Witold Waszczykowski are also names that have often been mentioned to take the post of Foreign Minister.

"We need a strong government," says Jaroslaw Kaczynski who says he is ready to take courageous decisions. He has indicated that the "creative tension" that would exist between himself and the President of the Republic Bronislaw Komorowski (PO), if he became Prime Minister after the parliamentary elections on 9th October next would be more constructive than "the soporific harmony" that reigns between Donald Tusk and the head of State. In the event of victory, Law and Justice (PiS) would however find the situation difficult: indeed the party refuses any type of alliance with the PO; a coalition with the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) is almost impossible and a union with the People's Party (PSL) would probably not be enough to win the absolute majority in Parliament.

Former representative of the popular classes, the left has now adopted a more social-liberal approach, by

drawing closer to heads of companies with whom it now has good relations. This development has not been without consequences, many voters in the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) have left the party to join the PO (a "strategic" vote may also explain this change in support). Internally the SLD leader Grzegorz Napieralski, has changed the party's structures, promoted young people and concentrated powers, whilst the former Democratic Left Alliance comprised numerous trends. The left's reputation in Poland is nevertheless extremely mediocre because of its links with the former Polish Unified Workers' Party (PZPR) which led the country for 41 years (1948-1989). The SLD does still have a loyal, stable, electorate however.

The party supports a reduction in VAT on medicines, foodstuffs and cultural and sports activities. It is asking for the introduction of a minimal salary for farmers and increases in healthcare and education spen-

ding, as well as on investments in infrastructures.

Its leader Grzegorz Napieralski has set the goal of winning 18% of the vote on October 9th next. The party would consider a result lower than 15% a failure.

The most recent poll by Homo Homini, published on 25th September, the Civic Platform (PO) retains its lead with 33% of the vote, followed by Law and Justice (PiS) 28%; the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) 12%; the People's Party (PSL) 9%, and the Palikot Movement (RPP), an anticlerical party founded in June 2011 by former PO member Janusz Palikot, 3.5%, which is probably going to play the role of kingmaker. On 1st September, another poll by Homo Homini for the Polish public radio shows that the Civic Platform will obtain 30.1%, the PiS 29.1%, the People's Party (PSL) 10.4%, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) 9.9%; and the Palikot Movement (RPP) 9%.

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