

The Civic Platform (PO) won the polish general elections

From **Corinne Deloy**
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RESULTS

The Civic Platform (PO) of the outgoing Prime Minister Donald Tusk came top in the parliamentary elections held on 9th October. It won 38.96% of the vote and 207 seats (-2 compared to the previous elections held on 21st October 2007), well ahead of its main conservative opponent, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), the main opposition party led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, which obtained 30.03% and 157 seats (- 9). There was a surprise from a new party, the Palikot Movement (RPP), an anti-clerical party founded in June 2011 by the businessman Janusz Palikot former member of the Civic Platform, which he left last year, came third with 9.94% and 40 seats in a country where over 90% of the population declare themselves to be Catholic. Waldemar Pawlak's People's Party (PSL), member of the outgoing government's coalition, collected 8.55% and 28 seats (- 3). The Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) led by Grzegorz Napieralski saw a sharp decline, obtaining 8.19% and 27 seats (- 26). Remember that 4 years ago the party entered the elections with the democratic party (PD), the Social Democracy of Poland party (SLD) and the Labour Union (PD), within the Democratic Left Alliance (LiD). Finally, Poland Comes First (Polska jest Najwazniejsza, PJN), founded in November 2010 by former members of the liberal wing of the PiS and led by Pawel Kowal, failed to pass the obligatory limit of 5% of the vote required in order to enter parliament (2.18%). The PO won 63 seats in the Senate, the PiS 31 and the PSL 2. 4 seats are for independents. Less than half the electorate (48.63%) went out to vote, with turnout down by 5.25 points compared to the last parliamentary elections on 21st October 2007.

«This is the victory of optimistic Poland. I would like to thank all those who voted for us and all those who did not because together we will have the responsibility of leading Poland for four more years», declared the outgoing Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, adding «These 4 years will be an even more important challenge because we will have to work twice as hard and act twice as quickly. The Polish people have the right to live better». «The most important thing is to preserve Poland from political, economic and financial catastrophe and to finish what we started four years ago» warned the outgoing head of government during his electoral campaign, during which he multiplied warnings against the threat that a victory of the PiS would cause to weigh on the country.

With no absolute majority, the Prime Minister will have to find partners with whom to form a government coalition. «I do not think that Donald Tusk will approach Janusz Palikot to form a coalition. If the PO-PSL coalition is too small, the head of government will probably attempt to poach a few

SLD MPs» says Jacek Raciborski, political sciences researcher at Warsaw University. The PSL has stated that it is willing to continue its collaboration with the PO in government.

Donald Tusk has a hard task ahead of him over these next 4 years. Modernisation of infrastructures is running late and many reforms (notably those concerning the health system, public finances or simplification of the administrative system for both businesses and individuals) are marking time. «The golden age is behind us and we are already seeing the first symptoms of an economic slowdown with a fall in exports and consumer spending» indicated Pawel Swieboda, political commentator, «We're like a beach hut facing the ocean. We could be submerged by the waves of crisis. Almost 60% of our exports go to the euro area, 80% to Europe», says economist Ryszard Petru.

«We respect the results of the legislative elections, but our task over the next 4 years will be to convince the millions of Poles that our country

needs major changes and that another form of Republic is essential. Sooner or later we will win because we are right», underlined PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski. «Things will have to change in the PiS because Jaroslaw Kaczynski will not be able to mobilise his electorate over the course of the next 4 years without giving them anything in return» declared Stanislaw Mocek, political commentator at the Polish Academy of Sciences.

«You could say it's a miracle - but we are not believers. You are the ones who have created the miracle. It's a great hope to know that in Poland there are millions of people who want a secular, civic and open State, where faith is kept a private matter», declared Janusz Palikot. «I want to be the new messiah of the left, the one who will change Polish politics», he said to Newsweek Polska magazine during the election campaign. A businessman, Janusz Palikot was elected as a Member of Parliament in 2005 on the PO lists and was re-elected in the parliamentary elections held on 21st October 2007. The Palikot Movement (RPP) has about 30,000 members. It speaks for taxation of the clergy, liberalisation of laws on abortion and cannabis, euthanasia and adoption for homosexual couples. It also wants to put an end to religious education in state schools. A pro-European liberal he is also in favour of a rapprochement of Poland and Germany.

«In the nineties, all the parties were close to the Church. But the deal has changed and 20 years have gone by. Now 33% of Poles say they no longer have any confidence in the Church, and that figure is constantly on the increase. The Polish people have had enough of instrumentalisation and recuperation» states Lena Kolarska-Bobinska, MEP and director of the Polish Public Affairs Institute, adding, «The Church is still very powerful in Poland, particularly amongst the institutions. But its influence is waning amongst young people. The movement will go the same way here as it has in all other European countries. The secularisation process began later, it is certainly slower, but Poland will little by little begin to look like its neighbours». «I will not be an easy coalition partner. I will not participate in any government that is not willing to undertake radical measures such as a complete reworking of the education system and modernisation of the local government system» declared Janusz Palikot.

Aged 54 and originally from Eastern Pomerania (he is a member of the Kashubian community, a Slavonic minority from the Gdansk region, disputed for years between Poland and Germany), Donald Tusk is a history graduate from Gdansk University where in his youth he was an active militant in the Solidarnosc Union. A member of the Liberal-Democratic Congress (KLD) and then of the Liberty Union (UW), he founded the Civic Platform in March 2001 with Andrzej Olechowski and Maciej Plazynski.

Elected a member of parliament in 1991, he became vice-president of the Diet, the lower house of parliament, from 2001 to 2005. A candidate in the presidential election of 23rd October 2005, he collected 45.53% of the vote and was beaten by Lech Kaczynski (PiS) (54.47%). Two years later Donald Tusk became Prime Minister after the parliamentary elections held on 21st October 2007, which he won with 41.51% of the vote.

His first mandate at the head of the government acted as a pause in a decade rocked by several political scandals and many tensions between political parties and between politicians. The Prime Minister succeeded in giving Poland the image of a moderate, conciliatory nation, considerably improving his country's relations with its two neighbours, Germany and Russia. Donald Tusk can also be proud of the fact that Poland is the only country in the European Union not to have suffered recession after the international economic crisis which began in autumn 2008. In 2009 Warsaw saw its GDP increase by 1.7%. Growth should again reach 4% next year. An increase in salaries and the reduction in unemployment have led to an increase in tax revenue. Finally, the state of public finances is very satisfactory compared to that of other European States, even though State spending is still too high (the public deficit reached 7.9% in 2010).

The Civic Platform is therefore the first party to be returned to office since the break-up of the Communist system in Poland in 1989. Donald Tusk is the 2nd head of government (with the current president of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, Prime Minister from 1997 to 2001) to have reached the end of his 4-year mandate at the head of government. «This result bears witness to the fact that democracy is being consolidated in Poland», declared Jacek Raciborski.

Results of the parliamentary elections held in Poland on 9th October 2011

Turnout : 48.63%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No of votes won in the Diet	No of votes won in the Senate
Civic Platform (PO)	5 119 833	38.96	207	63
Law and Justice (PiS)	3 946 533	30.03	157	31
Palikot Movement (RPP)	1 305 095	9.94	40	0
People's Party (PSL)	1 123 516	8.55	28	2
Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	1 076 675	8.19	27	0
Poland Comes First (PJN)	285 970	2.18	0	0
Others	281 060	2.14	1	4

Source: National Electoral Commission website
<http://www.wybory2011.pkw.gov.pl>

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