



CEC Weekly Political Update **9th November 2018**

Independence Day

Political marches frequently accompany Poland's annual Independence Day celebrations. Each year, several rallies all representing different political and national outlooks take place in Warsaw. The Independence March has gathered the largest number of attendants throughout the years. The main organisers are nationalists from the National Radical Camp and the All-Poland Youth. This year, the issue of the march has been especially contentious due to the celebrations of 100th anniversary of Polish independence.

On Wednesday, Warsaw mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz banned the Independence March, citing potential threats to participants. In response, PM Morawiecki met with President Duda and decided to

organize a governmental march that will have the same route as the banned event. Yesterday, the appellate court in Warsaw overturned Gronkiewicz-Waltz's decision. Still, with the governmental march already planned, the government argues that the court's ruling does not change the situation as state events supersede other events.

According to a poll conducted by IBRIS prior to the bans issued by Warsaw and Wrocław, only 2% of survey persons declared their participation in marches organised by right-wing organisations – 19% would consider, and 79% would not participate. Amongst those who declare or would consider participation 29% are aged 18–29 and 25% aged 50–59.

The future of the initial march organised by right-wing organisations is uncertain. Representatives of the government avoid answering this question and only refer to the state-organised event. Still, representatives of the right-wing organisations remain adamant that their march will take place as planned – encouraging President Duda to participate. The organisers also called for the government not to interfere with their march as it is a citizen initiative – its form and slogans presented, according to organisers, will not be amended in light of the new situation. Legally, together with the ruling of the court, the situation became more complex. On Sunday afternoon, the situation is going to be dynamic, and interventions by uniformed forces are very possible.

The celebrations on the 11th are made much more difficult due to the ongoing unofficial Police protests, with a significant portion of officers going on sick leave. To ensure proper security of the march, the governmental event will be organized with the help of the Ministry of National Defence. Yesterday, Prime Minister Morawiecki published an ordinance which states that the Military Police will aid the Police Force in securing the march. This was especially important prior to an agreement between uniform forces and the Ministry of Interior, which ended the strike. This week police officers went on mass sick leave, as a form of protest. Commentators feared that due to the limited police resource – approximately 30 thousand officers were on leave – the march organised by right-wing organisations could get out of control.

The ruling PiS party has fallen under a lot of criticism lately for leaving many preparations for the independence centenary for the last minute. Many commentators and opposition parties argue that PiS and President Duda had three years to prepare, and yet there will be no grand event or

investment to commemorate the occasion. Similarly, business organization have criticized the last-minute implementation of a national holiday on the 12th of November. The move has been portrayed as a last-ditch effort to appease the public. Still, ahead of the elections in 2019, the opposition is likely to point out several flaws in PiS' organization of the celebrations. While the course of events on Sunday will be important, in view of domestic and foreign media attention and political significance, it is the narrative that is established afterwards that will be key. A turbulent centenary of Independence is likely to become a symbol in domestic politics and a sign for the world that divisions still run deep in Polish politics and society itself.

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