



CEC Weekly Political Update **6th December 2018**

New Party on the Right

Procedures to register a new political party have begun this week. The motion for registration has been filed by MEP Mirośław Piotrowski. Piotrowski ran for the European Parliament from PiS' lists, but he left the party to become an independent. The proposed new party received the name "The True Europe Movement" (*Ruch Prawdziwa Europa*). On 4 December, however, the District Court in Warsaw stated that it cannot register the party due to inconsistencies in the proposed party statute – the motion will have to be corrected. While there is certainty that RPE will be a right-wing party with strong catholic roots, more details will only be announced by Piotrowski after registration procedures are complete.

MEP Piotrowski suggested that the party is meant to make its electoral debut in the 2019 EP elections. According to the wp.pl news portal, candidates of RPE for the EP elections are meant to include current and former PiS figures such as former Environment Minister Jan Szyszko, MEP Urszula Krupa, MP Gabriela Masłowska, or MP Anna Sobecka. Those who were mentioned by wp.pl as potential RPE candidates, however, have so far denied any involvement with Piotrowski's initiative.

Journalists and commentators have suggested that the move was initiated by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. Rydzyk is a catholic media mogul, an influential figure on the political right, and a longstanding ally of the ruling party. Leading PiS members have remained adamant that Rydzyk is not behind Piotrowski's new party. For many years, PiS has enjoyed the support of Rydzyk and his media outlets, which are a key platform for a part of the party's core voter base. Recently, Rydzyk's outlets have somewhat criticized PiS for issues such as not going through with further restrictions on abortion. If there is truth to the suggestions of the clergyman's unofficial involvement in the project, PiS will have to redefine its relationship with Rydzyk and deal with its first internal fracture since 2014.

In July 2014, PiS signed an agreement with two smaller right-wing groupings of Zbigniew Ziobro and Jarosław Gowin. This agreement now forms the basis of the United Right, with Ziobro and Gowin occupying high posts in the Morawiecki government. Commentators are arguing that RPE might be an attempt to achieve the same as PiS' partners in the United Right. Many PiS politicians have felt excluded during Morawiecki's time as Prime Minister. If the new party runs in the EP elections, rises above the electoral threshold and takes votes away from PiS, it will have leverage in talks with Jarosław Kaczyński ahead of the 2019 parliamentary race.

Even if RPE does not run in the EP race, or gain seats, the move has put a crack on the basic PiS narrative of cementing top right-wing figures under the United Right banner. Journalists and opposition politicians have frequently argued that internal conflicts within PiS are mounting. Even if only a few minor politicians transfer away from PiS, the opposition's claims, that unity within the ruling camp is wavering, will gain momentum.

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