



CEC Weekly Political Update **21st December 2018**

Law and Justice in 2019

In 2018, the ruling PiS party managed to maintain its support ratings oscillating around 40%. Despite several crises, dips in the party's popularity were usually momentary, falling below 35% a few times during the year. This stability has been attributed to quick reactions from the PiS leadership to arising issues and to the opposition's inability to build a united position followed with alternative proposals for voters.

The local elections have provided the ruling party with many lessons for 2019's parliamentary and EU races. While PiS nominally won the election, and greatly improved its standing in Regional Assemblies, the disappointment in terms of presidential seats in major cities was

palpable among top party figures. The growing polarisation between rural and urban voters will be the key variable taken into account by all parties when building strategies for the 2019 election campaigns.

Jarosław Kaczyński remains the undisputed leader of the ruling camp. Still, throughout 2018 speculations on succession within PiS have gained traction due to rumours of Kaczyński's poor health. Kaczyński himself gave no indication of preparing to leave. Commentators have argued throughout the year that there is no one politician within the United Right who would ensure stability in PiS and its factions. Major moves in the leadership are unlikely ahead of the Autumn 2019 elections. Still, a limited reshuffle in the Council of Ministers is almost certain; a few current ministers will likely run in the EU elections. This rebalancing will be indicative of the strategy PiS takes for the parliamentary race. Fresh faces are likely to appear in the campaign; figures which were largely unknown to the electorate before the last elections – PM Szydło, PM Morawiecki, and President Duda – have proven that nationwide recognition can be built within months.

The recent PiS congress has indicated that the ruling party will strive to strike a more moderate tone in 2019. A more pro-EU narrative will be implemented under the slogan “Poland is the heart of Europe” and confrontations with Brussels will be limited. PiS will also avoid opening new avenues of conflict with the opposition, taking a reactive approach to criticisms and attempting to paint the Civic Coalition as the aggressor in public debate. Consequently, the party's hardliners will take a secondary role in the next few months, which is already apparent from MP Krystyna Pawłowicz's announcement that she is leaving politics. Much of this strategy, however, rests on PiS' hope that the Civic Coalition under Grzegorz Schetyna will have limited success in uniting the opposition further. Newcomer parties, such as Robert Biedroń's new left-wing initiative, will also make it harder for Schetyna to mount a united anti-PiS offensive.

In terms of new laws and reforms, PiS will abstain from in-depth systemic reports. Ministries and the Parliament will focus on reactionary measures to limit fallout from arising problems, such as the current matter of growing electricity prices. The favourable economic situation will be the key platform for PM Morawiecki to build campaign promises

based around social spending and reindustrialisation. Locally, MPs will build on the success of the flagship 500+ family support scheme to prove that tangible progress was made and make promises for the future. While a lot can still change, and PiS has accumulated some negative baggage throughout its term, Kaczyński's party is likely to remain the front-runner in Polish politics in 2019.

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