



CEC Weekly Political Update **8th March 2019**

Speculations of Donald Tusk's return

Officially, Donald Tusk's second term as President of the European Council ends on 30 November 2019. In the past months, speculation has been growing that Tusk would resign from this post 3 months earlier to make a return to domestic politics. Until now, the most popular theory was that Tusk would start signalling his involvement in the parliamentary elections campaign to gauge chances for a presidential bid in 2020. Last month, Tusk announced that he would be involved in a new initiative – the “4th June movement” – which some have speculated would be an organized political movement.

The 30th anniversary celebrations of the first partially free elections in

Poland will be celebrated across the country on 4 June. Importantly, this will take place just a week after the European elections and the celebrations will likely act as a symbolic start of the campaign ahead of the November parliamentary election. Commentators are already predicting that there will be little chance for national unity during this anniversary, and that parties will use this as a chance to present initial programmes and candidates for the parliamentary race.

Since Tusk's announcement, circulating speculation that the movement would be an alternative for the PO proved worrisome for many opposition figures. Expert reports indicate, however, that the planned initiative would support the PO and other like-minded opposition parties, and not seek to build an alternative grouping. Others, including PO figures, have stated that Tusk will not act in an official capacity in any new movement but rather support an initiative made up of PO's leading figures in local governments. In the coming campaigns, PO hopes to use the momentum in urban areas where the party's candidates dominated during the 2018 local elections and now hold presidential posts.

In the international context, Tusk's potential early resignation from the European Council has sparked interest across the bloc. The move could mean that a new EU Council chief would be in place shortly after the UK withdraws from the Union and the second phase of negotiations begin. Up to now, Tusk played a crucial role in negotiations, organising summits and chairing meetings but also becoming increasingly politically involved and critical of the UK.

Still, it is important to note, that Grzegorz Schetyna has cemented himself as the leader of the Civic Platform. Despite numerous allies and supporters, the retrun of Donald Tusk to the party's structures would likely tigger some animosity between its key figures. This would support the theory of a potential new political structure. At the same time, however, Donald Tusk has reiterated that in order for the opposition parties to regain rule in Poland, they would have to burry all hatchets and work collectively. While PiS critics hope that Tusk's return to Polish politics may work as a uniting trigger, it is more likely that his final decision will be dependent on the result of the general elections in Autumn. If PO returns to government, the risk of breaking fragile

amances would be much lower. Furthermore, Tusk's time in EU structures allowed him to somewhat change his image as he had to limit partisan political statements. His proponents argue that Tusk left Poland as a frontline politician and strategist but will return as a statesman. This would likely be an important factor in the Presidential elections.

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