

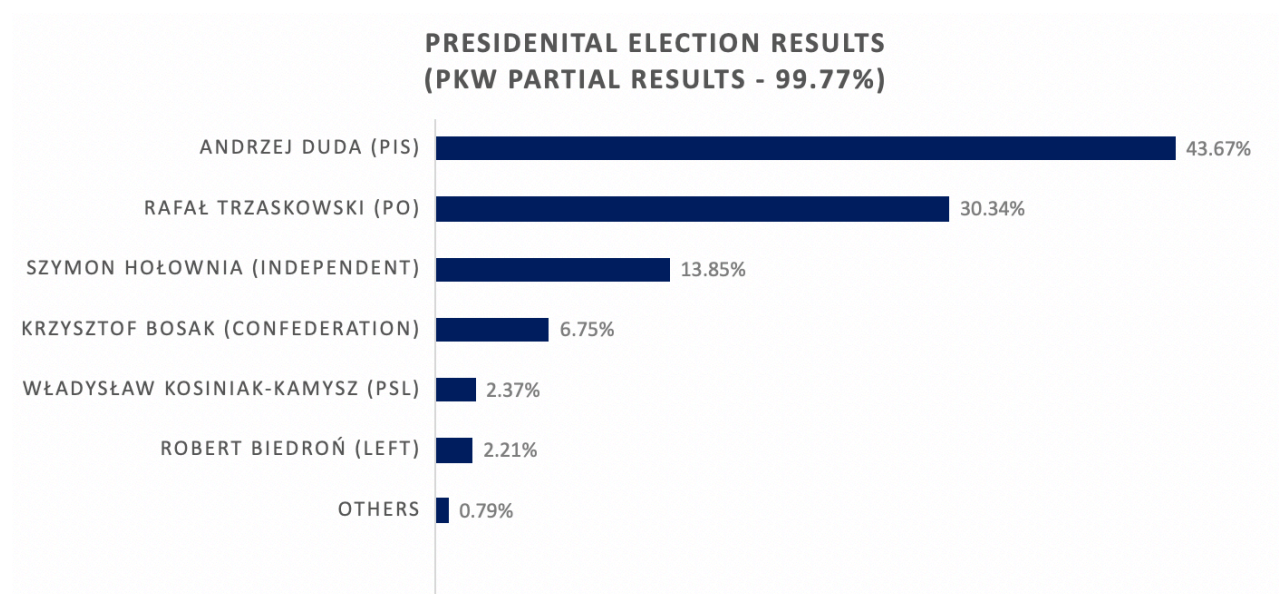


## CEC SPECIAL UPDATE

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### Polish Presidential Elections: The First Round

By Marek Matraszek, Chairman, CEC Government Relations



With almost 100% votes counted in Poland's Presidential elections, incumbent President Andrzej Duda scored 43.7%, with the candidate of the opposition Civic Coalition and current Mayor of Warsaw Rafał Trzaskowski gaining 30.3%. The main independent candidate, Szymon Hołownia, has garnered 13.9%, whilst the radical right candidate Krzysztof Bosak has scored 6.8%. In fifth place is the Polish Peoples' Party (PSL) candidate Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz with 2.4%, whilst the Left's Robert Biedroń noted a disastrous 2.2%. Minor candidates accounted for less than 1% of the remaining votes. The result means that Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski will face off in a tight head to head runoff on Sunday July 12<sup>th</sup>. The turnout was 64.4%.

Both Duda and Trzaskowski seem to have hit their natural ceilings of support in this round, and victory for either candidate in the second round will turn how many of the losing candidates' votes in this round will be transferred to whom, and also how many new voters will emerge in the second round - and how they will split. The high turnout in this first round may mean that the scope for new voters making an additional impact in two weeks' time may be less than anticipated.

As an incumbent President, Duda always was faced with the challenge of maintaining his appeal of five years ago, when it was easy to present himself as an insurgent against an establishment candidate, carrying the hopes of the people for change. This time, it is Duda who is seen as the

establishment offering, closely aligned with the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and thus difficult to present as a candidate of national unity. In these circumstances, Duda was forced to fall back on the tactic of mobilising to the greatest extent possible the traditional PiS party base - hence his campaign themes such as resistance to LGBT issues, defence of the retirement age, and support for Polish national interests in relation to Brussels, all of which form the core concerns of the PiS electorate. Duda also had to balance between showing himself to be a strong independent leader, whilst stressing the need for Poles to elect a President who would work closely with the current government of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in tackling the concurrent pandemic and economic crisis. At the end of the campaign, Duda played the foreign policy card by travelling to Washington for a surprise summit with President Trump in order to demonstrate his ability to deliver a close US-Poland relationship over defence, energy and COVID issues. Duda therefore built his campaign on promising to deliver security, predictability and social safety – enough to mobilise his natural supporters but not enough to win majority support in the first round.

The almost 44% vote of President Duda bodes relatively well for his chances in the second round, but does not provide certainty of victory at a time when the second round will likely see many supporters of the failed candidates piling behind Trzaskowski. The latter's vote represents a remarkable turnaround in the fortunes of the Civic Coalition, which at the beginning of the campaign had put forward Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska, the former Speaker of parliament, as their candidate. Yet the combination of the suspension of campaigning due to the COVID crisis, campaigning errors, and her own personality had seen her support plummet to below 10%. The delayed election, now conducted under special voter rules during the pandemic, allowed the party to replace her with Trzaskowski. His new campaign approach, focussing on policy proposals and an appeal to the youth vote dynamized his party base, allowed the Civic Coalition to return to its historic voter levels, and has meant that he is within a real chance of snatching the grand prize in two weeks time. Significantly, Trzaskowski has sought much more than did Kidawa-Błońska to appeal to non-core Civic Coalition voters, and this centrist appeal may yet allow him to garner a majority. Trzaskowski will have to count on the bulk of Hołownia's supporters – who may be tempted to stay home in the second round – and hope that many of the rightist Krzysztof Bosak's supporters do not back Duda. The low vote of Kosiniak-Kamysz and Biedroń mean that both Trzaskowski and Duda cannot hope for much of a switch effect from their former supporters.

Third place candidate Szymon Hołownia can be relatively satisfied with his 13% of the vote, defeating as he did candidates from the other mainstream parties, the PSL and the Left, as well as the rightist Confederation. This places Hołownia in a strong position not only in terms of signalling whom (if at all) his voters should back in the second round, but also in the longer term in Polish politics. Hołownia ran his campaign as much in opposition to Civic Platform as he did to PiS, and the PO and Trzaskowski should not take his voters for granted - if anything, it is more in Hołownia's interest that Duda ultimately wins than does Trzaskowski. If Trzaskowski loses, Hołownia will justifiably claim that the Civic Platform was to blame for Duda clinging to power, as paradoxically most polls had been showing Hołownia more likely than Trzaskowski to beat Duda in a run-off. He will then be emboldened to launch his own political movement, with the credo that only a refresh of the opposition with himself at the helm can defeat PiS in the 2023 parliamentary elections. A Trzaskowski win in contrast will likely reaffirm the primacy of the Civic Platform as the leading opposition force and force Hołownia to probably wither in the centre ground of Polish politics, joining a long list of failed centrist attempts to supplant the Civic Platform party.

The candidates bringing up the rear of the Presidential vote may seem of little consequence, yet this side-show tonight may presage significant shifts in the opposition ranks, and also determine the ability of the Civic Platform to form an alternate government to PiS in 2023. Hitherto, it had been the PSL and the Left that had seemed natural partners of any future Civic Coalition government, since PO – unlike PiS – is structurally incapable of winning an overall majority in parliament by itself. The disastrously low results of Kosinak-Kamysz and Biedroń reflect not only the polarisation of the vote between Duda and Trzaskowski, but also raise questions on their future roles in their parties. This is especially true of the Left, which ran Biedroń as their candidate with a heavy focus on metropolitan concerns of LGBT rights and other minority issues. Biedroń's failure to gain even minimum traction

may push the Left into a more social and “workerist” direction, symbolised by Adrian Zandberg, their leftist rising star who seems to be a young Polish version of the UK’s Jeremy Corbyn.

A denuded PSL party, and a more radical anti-liberal Left, may make it more difficult for PO to cobble together a future government coalition, and the votes of a squeezed putative Hołownia movement may not be enough to take them across the parliamentary wire. All the more so that the winner of the “second division” competition tonight - as opposed the Premiership tussle between Duda and Trzaskowski - appears to be Krzysztof Bosak of the rightist Confederation movement, which fuses together ultra-Catholics, nationalists, and economic libertarians into a heady cocktail that is clearly gaining support among Poland’s younger voters. Bosak’s 6.8% of the vote, albeit seemingly small, may yet make him a king maker in the second round, and it can be expected that Duda will reach into this reservoir of voters to take him over the requisite 50% of the vote on July 12<sup>th</sup>. Bosak will also try to build momentum over the next three years prior to the 2023 parliamentary election, in order to supplant both the PSL and the Left as a second-tier parliamentary force. That will give him the luxury of perhaps ensuring a continuation of PiS governance if at those elections the latter narrowly fail to gain a parliamentary majority.

The tussle for victory on July 12<sup>th</sup> will be made all the more dramatic that both Duda and Trzaskowski recognise that their own loss will almost certainly result in far-reaching consequences for Polish politics. A failure by Duda to secure a second term will mean the current Law and Justice government becoming potentially paralysed, as its ability to govern will be heavily stymied by an opposition-controlled Senate and Presidency. Will Jarosław Kaczyński, the PiS leader, encourage Prime Minister Morawiecki to soldier on regardless? Or will new parliamentary elections be called? Or perhaps might Kaczyński remove Morawiecki and install a different Prime Minister for the remainder of the parliamentary term? As for Rafał Trzaskowski, a loss will perhaps not mean the end of his political career – he has the Warsaw Mayoralty to return to – but it will once again raise questions of the ability of Civic Platform to defeat Law and Justice, even when they effectively had the luxury of running two candidates in the same election in their attempt to dislodge Duda. A PO party descending into new internal political warfare in order to answer this question, whilst an insurgent Szymon Hołownia awaits in the wings to pick up the mantle of Poland’s main anti-PiS force, is not a prospect that current PO leader Borys Budka will relish.

But let us leave speculation over the next three years of Polish politics for another time. In the immediate two weeks ahead of us, all attention will now focus on the July 12<sup>th</sup> run-off between Duda and Trzaskowski, and the clear attempts both will make to keep their own supporters mobilized, capture as many votes as possible from all their failed rivals, and also make a play for the possible new cohort of voters that will enter the electoral arena. To do this will require a finely-tuned effort by both men to remain radical enough to keep their base energised, centrist enough to capture new undecideds in the middle ground, and also be chameleon-like enough to be acceptable to voters who just two weeks earlier had voted for someone else entirely. Poland’s next President is likely to be chosen not on the basis of policy or personality, but as to which contender displays the greatest circus-like talents of balance, showmanship, and not a little bravado at the end.

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**Marek Matraszek, Chairman, can be contacted on:**



e-mail [mm@cecgr.com](mailto:mm@cecgr.com)



mobile +48 601 336 040