Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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Poland at the crossroads – could there be more Europe in a politically divided country from Monday?

"This is really the last chance", said Donald Tusk, the former prime minister of Poland and leader of the Civic Coalition bloc, the main rival of the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS), to his supporters at one of the most recent pre-election rallies.

Sunday's election will probably be the last chance for Tusk (66) personally, given his long tenure in Polish and European politics, but also the last chance for his super-opponent, the "boss" of the ruling Law and Justice Party, Jaroslaw Kaczynski (71).

One of them will politically retire on Sunday, and with him, the 2-party political scene, which has existed for 20 years in Poland, will probably go down in history.

Neither of these 2 dominant political options will be able to form a government independently, so the participation of smaller parties in a coalition government will be necessary.

Kaczynski's right-wing populists have been doing better in the days leading up to the elections than Donald Tusk's liberal and pro-European Civic coalition. The difference is not significant (several percentages) - 36 to 30 (Ipsos), 36 to 30 (Politico), and 34 to 30 (Kantar).

Donald Tusk encouraged his supporters with the Civic coalition's estimates that the deficit at the end of the campaign has been reduced to only 2%. But that is still far from Tusk's assessment, earlier in the campaign, that his alliance would have to beat Kaczynski's PiS by more than 5% to be sure of forming a government.

Tusk and his supporters are paying close attention to the outcomes of possible allies, particularly "Third Way" and "New Left." However, support for both groups are hovering around the electoral threshold of the 8% needed to enter the Sejm (parliament), and the opposite camp, led by Kaczynski, is keeping an eye on both groups' results.

If they achieve it, Tusk and the coalition could hope to win. Otherwise, most of the votes of Tusk's potential partners would become bitter opponents of PiS because the electoral system favours the strongest party when distributing the votes of those who did not achieve the electoral threshold.

Poland from Monday

Whoever forms the government from Monday will have a strong opposition. In the event of the conservatives in power, Poland would continue to strengthen its sovereignty, ignoring European complaints about the collapse of the rule of law and media freedom, and perhaps an even stronger anti-migrant orientation and disregard for the Union's green policy.

Kaczynski, strengthened by a new mandate, the third in a row, would have a wide field to develop his previous policies of investing in pensioners, farmers, residents of smaller towns and employees in traditional industries, which are under attack, primarily coal.

But before all that, Kaczynski and his PiS's top priority is to win on Sunday, which will not be simple because it would be challenging to find a partner who would enable them to form a government.

On the other hand, the change of government in Warsaw and the arrival of Tusk's coalition would be a prelude to significant changes in Poland, which is what their ambitious plan of 100 specific measures for a shift compared to the current government suggests.

There is a significant increase in public spending, by as much as €25 billion, intended for raising wages in the public sector, subsidies for housing loans, and health and social care.

Women's rights, which were limited under PiS leadership, would undergo significant changes.

The principal shift that awaits Poland, if the news is good for Tusk and his partners on Sunday, would definitely relate to the

correction of political and legal controversies that have been made by the conservative PiS government in the last 8 years - from promoting the rule of law to freeing the media from government influence.

Attitude towards Ukraine

One of the few constants after Sunday's elections will be Poland's attitude towards Ukraine and its defence against Russian aggression. There is a national consensus on this, regardless of the enormous political polarisation escalating ahead of Sunday's election.

Regardless of who will be in a position to form a new government, Poland will remain one of the most significant pillars of allied - European and NATO - support for Ukraine as a country that, along with the 3 Baltic states, has so far allocated the largest part of its GDP to support Kyiv, and which has accepted more than 3 million Ukrainian refugees.

However, the Conservative government showed this summer that it is possible for this priority, which has a national consensus, to move into the background if confronted with domestic interests.

Even though they tried to mitigate the damage, a dark stain remained on Poland's conservative government when they announced the freezing of delivery of arms and other aid to Kyiv over a dispute over Ukrainian grain exports that threatened Polish farmers.

More or less Europe

The principal difference between the 2 potential governments from Monday would be the attitude towards the European Union and the practice of its fundamental values, which Poland adopted with its membership in 2004, but moved backwards during the rule of the conservatives.

Tusk's pro-European government will undoubtedly have a close relationship with European partners and will try to quickly "fix" non-European solutions at home, restoring the image of full European democracy, which it lost with the rule of Kaczynski's populists.

A million people attended a massive opposition rally in Warsaw on October 1 to show their desire for Poland to continue on its path towards full inclusion in Europe without any issues regarding its democracy, which have been numerous in the previous 8 years.

The mainstream media, heavily influenced by the conservative government, paid almost no attention to this rally, even though it was the largest in Polish history. It was a good representation of Poland today and what it could be in just a few days.