



Eurozine News Item

The Polish Right: Its rise and fall?

On 22 September, Poland's rightwing governing coalition began to wobble when the leader of the populist Self-Defence Party (SRP) was sacked from the coalition along with his party. Now, Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, under the guidance of his brother, President Lech Kaczynski, must seek a new coalition partner for their Law and Justice Party (PiS). If they fail, new elections will be held in Poland in November. Could this be the beginning of the end of the Kaczynski twins' brief and controversial spell in the political limelight?

Since Autumn 2005, the Kaczynski government has both alarmed and puzzled outside observers: alarmed because of its vehemently illiberal politics and inroads into civil liberties; puzzled because a party that wishes to discredit much of what Poland has achieved since 1989 has attracted the support of a population overwhelmingly in favour of modernization. Viewed against previous governments' successful introduction of simultaneous democratic and economic transformation — a feat many in Poland and the West deemed impossible — the reactionary volte-face of the present government assumes startling proportions.

Among the articles collected here, Irena Maryniak [covers](#) the developments since the rightwing government assumed office six months ago: the growing role of Catholic radio station Radio Marja as government mouthpiece; the increasing ideologization of the school syllabus; the prospect of a spate of witch-hunts against former Communists; the government's promise to introduce "moral censorship" to reflect the traditional Polish Catholic ethos, including discrimination against homosexuals, to name but a few.

However, writes Maryniak, "For Poland to take the authoritarian Belarusian route, the clampdown on the media, satellite TV, and the Internet would have to be unprecedentedly severe and brutal. What bodes most immediately and visibly [...] is an intellectually straitjacketed, isolated European province, abandoned by its brightest and best." A diagnosis [corroborated](#) by Dariusz Zalega, who describes how the political neglect of the traditional coal-mining industry in Silesia, along with commercial transformation and the rise of the shopping centre, has led to a situation where half of all graduates from the region's universities seek work elsewhere in the EU.

It is not the Kaczynski's policies that are new, [writes](#) Aleksander Smolar, but a change of heart in the electorate. The "radical" government stems from that section of the Solidarity movement opposed to the route transformation took; for the radicals, the reckoning with the *ancien régime* has been insufficient, leading to a system they view as a pathological symbiosis of communism and capitalism, democracy and a post-communist mafia. The cultural

traditionalism of the PiS, writes Smolar, has landed on fertile ground in a contemporary Poland suffering from social alienation, distrust in democratic institutions, high unemployment, and growing income discrepancies.

"How Poland will develop in the coming years is difficult to say," concludes Smolar. "How should one presume to predict the distant future when the radical's first few months in power have thrown up so many problems? [...] Also unpredictable is the outcome of the tension between the Poles' growing satisfaction, despite all the difficulties, with their individual lives, their country, and its integration into the EU on one hand, and, on the other, a government whose legitimacy and programmes are based upon the rejection of precisely those changes that have led to these positive results."

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