

# Poland: Kaczynski brothers now control two most important political posts

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In a political coup over the weekend, the twin brothers Jaroslav and Lech Kaczynski took over the two most important political posts in Poland. Standing President Lech Kaczynski appointed his brother Jaroslav as prime minister and swore him into office on Monday.

As a result, the two most important offices of the Polish executive—the head of state and the head of government—are occupied by men who not only bear a confusing similarity to one another, but also share the same political positions. They have followed virtually identical political careers and support the same stock reactionary viewpoints.

Following parliamentary elections last September, Jaroslav Kaczynski, chairman and first candidate of the Law and Justice Party (PiS), deliberately turned down the post of prime minister so as not to endanger the electoral chances of his twin brother in the presidential elections, which took place one month later. There were good reasons for his decision: According to polls, even PiS supporters were skeptical about the two brothers occupying the two highest public offices. The decision paid off. Lech Kaczynski was elected as president with a small majority.

Eight months later, the former resolve has been turned on its head, although the prospect of the brothers dominating Polish political life is even more unpopular today than formerly. According to a poll conducted by the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, only 21 percent of those asked thought Jaroslav Kaczynski was a good prime minister, while 82 percent expressed their confidence in his predecessor, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz.

Marcinkiewicz explained the reasons for his “voluntary” resignation last Friday and was duly thanked and honoured for his services. It is, however, an open secret that he was forced to resign by the Kaczynski brothers. Jaroslav Kaczynski had already informed his coalition partners about the forthcoming change last Thursday.

Just one day later, the leadership of the PiS convened for a meeting to which Marcinkiewicz was also invited. In order to attend, he had to call off an official visit to Croatia. Immediately after the meeting, he then declared his resignation. As compensation, he has been allowed to stand as PiS candidate for the mayor of Warsaw in elections due this autumn.

Marcinkiewicz, a bland technocrat from the lower ranks of

the PiS, was seen as a loyal aide of the Kaczynski brothers at the time of his appointment. Once in office, however, he began to distance himself from his mentors.

In power, the Kaczynskis continued to move further away from the free-market Citizen Platform (PO)—their original choice as coalition partner—and followed an increasingly anti-European and nationalist course before forming a coalition with two ultra-right parties—the Farmers’ Self-Defense Party (Samoobrona) and the League of Polish Families (LPR). During this time, Marcinkiewicz was considered to represent the free-market wing inside the PiS. He favoured more amicable relations with Europe and repeatedly tried to bring the Citizen’s Platform into the coalition. According to opinion polls, he was the most popular member of cabinet.

The differences between Marcinkiewicz and the Kaczynskis emerged particularly in relation to questions of personnel.

Thus, in May, the pro-European foreign affairs minister, Stefan Meller, resigned in protest at the admission of the two ultra-right parties into government. Against the clear wishes of his prime minister, President Kaczynski appointed as replacement Anna Fotyga, who is considered a foreign policy hardliner.

Then, in June, Marcinkiewicz’s finance minister, Zyta Gilowska, was toppled over accusations that she had kept quiet about her links to the Stalinist security forces. The unproven accusations were probably launched by the secret services, which are subordinate to PiS supervision. Gilowska was considered an exponent of free-market policies and was a longtime and prominent member of the PO.

The last straw for Marcinkiewicz was the so-called “potato affair.” With the title “Poland’s new potato,” the German daily paper *Taz* published a tasteless satire over the Polish president, which caused a sensation in Warsaw. Several Polish newspapers speculated that the affair was the reason for Kaczynski’s absence on July 3 from a planned meeting of the Weimar trio. Kaczynski claimed an upset stomach as the reason he was unable to attend the regular summit of the German chancellor with the French and Polish presidents.

In response, all of Poland’s eight foreign affairs ministers since 1990 protested in a letter against this behaviour. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, a signer of the letter, said that if a

president misses such an important date, it must be at least because of an “airplane crash.” Marcinkiewicz is also said to have sharply condemned the behaviour of Kaczynski internally.

Then, last Thursday, Marcinkiewicz met with opposition leader Donald Tusk of the PO. Kaczynski’s absence from the Weimar meeting was allegedly discussed by the two men, who also explored the possibility of a new coalition between the PiS and PO. It was, however, already too late. One day later, Marcinkiewicz had to submit his resignation.

The nomination of Jaroslaw Kaczynski means a further shift to the right by the government, which will now rely exclusively on the PiS and the ultra-right-wing forces in parliament. The new head of government declared a central goal would be the implementation of a “fourth republic,” which his party had promised in its election campaign—i.e., a strong, authoritarian state with substantial presidential authority.

The Marcinkiewicz government had already taken steps to extend the powers of the state apparatus and develop authoritarian structures. One of its first draft laws involved a revision of the country’s broadcasting law that gives PiS complete control of the National Broadcasting Council. At the same time, the council was given increased powers to intervene in the reporting of public broadcasting, supposedly for the purposes of “protecting journalistic ethics.”

The Kaczynski brothers are determined to go further. Both men defend attacks on homosexuals and want to tighten up criminal law. Their aim is to strengthen the ties between the Polish state and the Catholic Church while purging alleged “communist” influences.

The direction they intend to follow is clear from the plans by Education Secretary Roman Giertych to introduce the teaching of patriotism into the Polish school curriculum. Giertych is chairman of the League of Polish Families, but his plans are also supported by PiS deputies. The plans have already led to violent protests. In a very short period, pupils and teachers collected 140,000 signatures calling for the replacement of Giertych, and more than 10,000 took to the streets all over the country in protest.

Giertych has also presented a computer programme that is to be installed on school computers and that prevents certain web sites (including those of opposition parties) from being accessed.

His father Maciej Giertych, who sits in the European parliament for the LPR, recently used his position to praise the Spanish dictator Franco. He expressed his regret that currently there were no more statesmen of the rank of the fascist general. Europe should be grateful, he declared, for the fact that Franco had protected Catholic Spain from communist attack.

It can be expected that the Kaczynski brothers will unscrupulously use their newly won power to further their own interests and strengthen their nepotistic grip on the state. In its short term of office, the PiS has already levered Kaczynski supporters into a whole range of important positions.

First, the top positions in the secret services were replaced. Interior Minister Ludwik Dorn appointed a new head of police, who is in the process of replacing regional police commanders. Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro appointed new state attorneys and has sought to circumvent the law and bring the Supreme Judicial Council under his control. The foreign affairs minister also replaced ambassadors in 20 countries. There are plans to centrally organise such changes in future via a so-called anti-corruption office (ZAB).

Kaczynski has taken over the head of government in an extremely tense situation. A number of ministers have already been sent packing in the short term of the Marcinkiewicz administration, and Poland has had no fewer than four different finance ministers during the last eight months. All four had tried to impose an austerity budget in the face of fierce opposition.

Just a few weeks after its election, the government was confronted with violent protests by hospital personnel. Demonstrations and strikes spread from the southeast region of Podkarpacie across the country. Workers demanded an immediate 30 percent wage increase and a doubling of wages next year. With monthly wages averaging 1,400 to 1,550 zloty (about €350-€400) those were modest demands. The Marcinkiewicz government reacted by threatening to tighten up anti-strike laws and implement disciplinary measures against strikers.

Mine workers then carried out token strikes and protests in the spring in order to achieve a share of profits from the industry. Last year alone, the profit of three mining industry enterprises rose to around €250 million.

According to a poll conducted by the Pentor Institute, a clear majority of the Polish population supported the demands and strikes by miners and hospital personnel. According to another poll by GRP Polonia, if an election were held today, the three governing parties would receive a little more than 30 percent of the vote.

At the same time, according to a June study of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): “The job market in Poland is the worst in the entire OECD.” The report requests the government simplify the tax system and drastically reduce them for enterprises. This would be accompanied with further cuts to be imposed on the population as a whole.



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