

New right-wing, anti-Russian government takes power in Poland

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25 November 2015

On November 16, Polish president Andrzej Duda swore in the new government of Prime Minister Beata Szydło. The new government includes several anti-Russian hardliners and advocates of closer collaboration with the United States. It stands for both an aggressive foreign policy and attacks on the social and democratic rights of the Polish population.

The right-wing, nationalist Law and Justice Party (PiS) won the parliamentary election in October and commands a comfortable majority in both houses of parliament, the Sejm (the lower house) and the Senate.

While Szydło heads the new government, Jarosław Kaczyński actually pulls the strings in the party and the government. The latter is the twin brother of former President Lech Kaczyński, who died in a plane crash in 2012. Jarosław Kaczyński was prime minister from July 2006 to November 2007. Several of his colleagues from that time have been given positions in the new government.

Antoni Macierewicz, who was deputy defense minister between 2005 and 2007 and claimed that he had purged the military and security apparatus of “communists” and “Russian agents,” is the new defense minister. He enjoys close relations with the heads of the Catholic radio station Radio Maryja, which is popular in rural government circles and broadcasts aggressively nationalistic, anti-Semitic and militaristic propaganda.

Witold Waszczykowski, an outspoken advocate of a close alliance with Washington, is now foreign minister. He was a graduate student in international studies at the University of Oregon and completed his education at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, an institution well connected to various government and intelligence agencies. Waszczykowski served for several years as the Polish foreign ministry’s chief

negotiator with the US over the stationing of a rocket defense system in Poland. He was a sharp critic of his predecessor Radosław Sikorski, who in intercepted private conversations spoke in an extremely vulgar and derogatory manner about the country’s alliance with the United States and had warned that Poland would come into conflict with Germany as well as Russia.

With the naming of Mateusz Morawiecki as deputy prime minister and minister for development, the PiS is signalling to Polish business interests that it will not carry out the social and economic campaign promises it made to the population.

Morawiecki is president of the Bank Zachodni WBK (BZ WBK), one of the largest banks in Poland, and an advocate of economic deregulation and privatization. According to the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, he earned 150,000 Złoty (about €35,000, or \$US 37,200) per month last year as president of the BZ WBK alone. The average monthly income in Poland is under 4,000 Złoty (€1,000).

The new minister for science and higher education, Jarosław Gowin, is a well-known ultra-reactionary, homophobe and opponent of the right to abortion. Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro occupied this post between 2005 and 2007.

The naming of Mariusz Kamiński as head of the police and security agencies is especially controversial. He presided over the central anti-corruption office between 2005 and 2007 and was sentenced to three years in prison because of “misuse of power” in two decisions in 2009 and 2011. This decision was not legally binding, however. The court also forbade him from holding public office for a period of ten years.

President Duda took the extraordinary step of summarily pardoning Kamiński on November 17. A spokesperson for the president’s office commented that

Duda believed there were political motivations behind Kamiński's sentence and, consequently, wanted to bring the whole thing "to an end."

The composition of the new government has caused alarm within the formerly ruling People's Party (PO) and sections of the media that support the PO.

The current edition of the magazine *Newsweek Polska* is entitled "The Kaczyński epoch dawns." In this edition, Chief Editor Tomasz Lis cautions against a foreign policy orientation based on an alliance with the US alone. Referring to the crisis in the European Union, Lis warns that "a strong Poland" is only possible within a strong EU. This necessitates close collaboration between Poland, France and Germany, he argued. The "anti-German tones" of the PiS in the election campaign caused bitterness in Berlin and are not in the interests of Poland, he said.

Lis refers to the plan for a broad alliance of eastern European states including Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary against Russia—similar to a plan pursued after World War I for a federation of Central and Eastern European countries led by Poland—as a chimera. (See: "Polish ruling class divided over foreign policy in run-up to general election")

The domestic policy of the new government has also provoked mistrust. In the cards is an extensive purge of the state apparatus and a change in the constitution. The government has already taken the first steps in this direction. Both branches of parliament approved a law proposed by the PiS to make possible the new elections for five of the 15 judges on the constitutional tribunal.

During the vote in the Sejm, representatives of the opposition parties left the room in protest. The PO believes that the actions of the PiS are illegal and talked about a "scandalous attack on the constitutional tribunal."

The Polish constitutional tribunal was founded in 1982 and based on the model of the American Supreme Court. It became active in 1986. The tribunal examines the constitutionality of new laws as well as changes in the Polish constitution. The current constitution was introduced in 1997 after the restoration of capitalism. The tribunal is made up of 15 judges who are individually selected from the Sejm for terms of 9 years each.

With the election of five new judges, the PiS hopes to establish a majority with its own candidates and change

the composition of the tribunal in its favour so that it can change the constitution.

Moreover, the PiS announced during the election campaign that it would consolidate the duties of the state prosecutor and the minister of justice, abolishing the former as a position independent of the executive. In effect, this would amount to the abolition of the separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers of government.

The PiS has once again announced this year that it wants to make extensive changes in the constitution. A draft of the constitution from 2011 included a dramatic increase in the powers of the presidency, a corresponding weakening of the role of the Sejm, a weakening of the separation of church and state, and a ban on abortions.



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