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The pendulum swings back

The Tusk government has made Poland the security anchor of Europe. How long will the pro-EU course last?

At the Munich Security Conference many called for European unity and coordinated action to meet the EU's geopolitical ambitions, in particular regarding its defence and economic potential, with or without the United States. This message was heard in Berlin and Paris, and also in Warsaw. Since the 2023 election, Poland is back at the European table. The departure of the PiS-led national-conservative government has led to a different tone and to different policies. Today, the 5th most populous EU member state plays a particularly important role for Europe's security architecture, especially concerning the ongoing war in neighbouring Ukraine. Yet, this might not last. An analysis of opinion polls ahead of the 2027 parliamentary election shows that the comeback of a national-conservative government, even more radical than the last, is a realistic scenario. Poland's allies should be ready for a twist of events that will further complicate an already complicated political landscape in Europe and beyond.

The national-conservative Law and Justice party (PiS) governed in Poland for two consecutive terms between 2015 and 2023. During that time, Poland pivoted to the right in domestic affairs as well as in foreign policy, finding its chief ally in Viktor Orbán of Hungary. This caused major headaches in Brussels, not only due to the erosion of the rule of law but also because of Polish-Hungarian resistance to key EU policy proposals on immigration, energy transition, and institutional reforms. Moreover, German-Polish relations became particularly strained as the PiS eagerly applied anti-German rhetoric to mobilise voters. Brussels and Berlin were repeatedly accused of sabotaging Poland by imposing an 'immigration dictate', of ruining industry and agriculture by pushing the European Green Deal, or even of forming 'the Fourth Reich'. At the same time, both PiS governments always declared their support for the struggling Ukraine and followed through materially. While they favoured the closest possible relations with the US over their European partners, they had a very clear critical position vis-à-vis Putin's regime.

Since December 2023, the tables have turned. Donald Tusk's Christian-

democratic Civic Coalition (KO) did not win the parliamentary elections, yet managed to build a majority coalition with the liberal-conservative alliance *Trzecia Droga* and the social-democratic *Lewica*. The end of the PiS era was welcomed by both European centre-left and centre-right parties and governments. Poland was back at the European table. In recognition of that sharp U-turn, funds from the Resilience and Recovery Facility, frozen due to rule of law violations, were released.

The likelihood of a right-wing shift

Under the Tusk government, bilateral relations with Germany improved, especially after the CDU, sister party of Tusk's Civic Platform (PO), reclaimed the *Kanzleramt*. Friedrich Merz chose Poland for his first foreign visit, and Tusk announced 'a new beginning in German-Polish relations'. A revival of the Weimar Triangle followed, more partners were added to the 'plus' format. Poland, as NATO member and front-line country in the ongoing war in Ukraine, became a credible partner for the West. The new Polish government chose security as its *leitmotif* for the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2025, stressing the urgency of strengthening EU defence in the face of perceived threats from Russia.

After Donald Trump's election, the US recalibrated their role in the world, putting 'America first', as promised. In office, Trump has put support for Ukraine in question numerous times. The new American security strategy can be summarised as 'Tariffs and threats': trade wars, withdrawal from international organisations and conventions, and violation of international law. This sent shockwaves across Europe, but did not necessarily result in a united front. The PiS party welcomed Trump's victory with enthusiasm. In the middle of the Polish presidential campaign, the US-based Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), an international gathering of the radical right, was held in Poland for the first time, in the PiS-stronghold of Rzeszów. The candidate supported by the PiS, Karol Nawrocki, visited the White House both during his campaign and as president-elect, signalling his personal and ideological ties with MAGA America. Dominik Tarczyński, a PiS Member of the European Parliament, celebrated the brutality of ICE in Minneapolis and handed out red 'Make Poland Great Again' baseball caps. For the Polish national-conservatives, the liberal West is not an ally. It is the illiberal West that they trust. In Europe, they still nurture close ties with Viktor Orbán, despite his ambivalent attitude toward Russia and open hostility toward Ukraine, and with like-minded political groupings.

Two other far-right

Today, the PiS party has lost some of its appeal.

movements are gaining traction in Poland.

Its 24,8 per cent of support in polls is just a shadow of its hegemony in 2015 (37,58 per cent) or even in 2023, when it received 35,38 per cent of the vote. But nature abhors a vacuum. Two other far-right movements are gaining traction in Poland. The New Right *Konfederacja* remains the third political force (12,3 per cent in recent polls). The isolationist, Eurosceptic *Konfederacja* wants a libertarian Poland, militarily well-equipped, yet staying away from foreign wars, keeping an equidistance to the US and Russia. Polish aid of Ukraine would be abolished. The novice on the Polish political scene, *Konfederacja Korony Polskiej*, is even more radical. This far-right party with strong antisemitic roots demands a Polish exit from the EU and a normalisation of relations with Russia. While not openly supporting the regime in Moscow, it exhibits suspicious ties with it. In opinion polls, it occupies the fourth position (8,4 per cent).

The two competing centres of power are both unstable: President Karol Nawrocki enjoys the trust of 47.7 per cent of Poles, and Prime Minister Donald Tusk is trusted by 41.7 per cent. The far right helped the PiS regain presidential power in 2025 by supporting its candidate. It is likely that it will again be the kingmaker in the next parliamentary elections, which must be held by 11 November 2027 at the latest. History might repeat itself.

Were the Poles to elect a new government today, the ruling party of Donald Tusk would not be able to form a majority government, falling short by 24 mandates, with the left only slightly above the electoral threshold of five per cent (6.2 per cent) and the liberals completely diminished. Electoral arithmetic renders an alternative scenario: the return of the national-conservative PiS, with two new coalition partners from the far-right, and in close alliance with President Karol Nawrocki. This outcome is plausible because Polish right-wing voters accept a broad alliance to successfully challenge the centrist Tusk government.

A favourable scenario for both Berlin and Brussels is certainly possible.

What could such an outcome mean for Poland and Europe? The right-wing opposition is already testing grounds for possible cooperation. For example, in the context of the SAFE programme (Security Action for Europe), aimed

at the modernisation of the EU's armed forces and to reduce dependence on the US, Poland would receive EUR 43.7 billion, in part in form of low-interest loans, for the purchase of military equipment manufactured in Europe. But the future of the plan will be decided in a domestic political conflict, with both sides flexing muscles. The PiS criticised the lack of transparency, the political pressure from Germany, and the risk of straining the relationship with the Trump administration. Konfederacja criticised rushed proceedings and the high level of debt. Meanwhile, the EU commission has approved Poland's investment plan, and now President Nawrocki will have to decide whether to sign the bill implementing the program. Jarosław Kaczyński (PiS) has called for a presidential veto.

A favourable scenario for both Berlin and Brussels is certainly possible. During the Munich Security Conference, Prime Minister Tusk met with Péter Magyar, Viktor Orbán's main rival, who stands a real chance to take power away from Fidesz in Hungary. They discussed a potential recalibration of Warsaw-Budapest relations. But what if Orbán stays in power and in a year or two the Polish situation radically changes? If Eurosceptics take over Warsaw and choose Trump's America over a united Europe? This scenario seems distant, but European governments in Berlin, Paris, Brussels, and also Kyiv should prepare for it today.



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