

Daniel Szeligowski, Poland

Poland after Presidential Election: No Major Changes in Foreign Policy

Andrzej Duda has claimed a victory over incumbent Bronislaw Komorowski in Sunday's presidential election in Poland. His success marks a shift in Polish internal politics, but when it comes to foreign policy, one should not expect the revolution. Duda will try to review relations with Germany, seek closer ties with the United States, stay firm on Russia, and play more active role in settling the conflict in Ukraine.

Andrzej Duda (Law and Justice party, PiS), 43-year-old lawyer from Krakow, will become a next president of Poland. He has so far been a rather unknown politician. Duda served as legal adviser to former President Lech Kaczynski, was a deputy justice minister and a member of the Polish Parliament. He also became a member of the European Parliament in 2014, where he vice chaired a Delegation to the Africa Caribbean Pacific – European Union Joint Parliamentary Assembly. As a Head of State, Andrzej Duda will be in charge of the armed forces, cooperating on foreign policy with the foreign affairs minister, signing or vetoing bills and drafting his own legislation.

Duda does not seem to have a strong view on foreign policy and he lacks relevant experience in the field. During the election campaign, he focused mainly on domestic issues, e.g. retirement age, tax-free slab, renationalisation of banking sector. As a member of the European Parliament, President-elect belonged to European Conservatives and Reformists Group (together with Cameron-led Conservative Party) and criticized Polish stance on Germany and the EU.

Having taken power in 2005, his party “Law and Justice” (PiS) pursued nationalist policy, which eventually led to isolation of Poland on the international arena, in particular within the European Union, as well as worsening relations with Germany.

Assertiveness within the European Union

Andrzej Duda is a conservative Eurosceptic who advocates for protection of Polish national interests and calls for shifting more power from Brussels back to member states. New Polish President is also a fierce opponent of adopting the euro. During campaign he declared himself as a defender of national currency and accused Bronislaw Komorowski of intention to join the Eurozone without the national consent. One should expect Duda to take a more assertive position on such issues as EU climate pact, energy and agriculture. In a TV debate Duda promised to follow the path of Victor Orban and announced that under his presidency Poland should not remain in the mainstream of European politics.

However, as Polish President has to cooperate with the government on foreign policy, upcoming parliamentary elections in Poland will be of great importance. For example, constitution does not specify whether it is President or Prime Minister who is entitled to participate in European Council meetings, so there may be (once again) a potential conflict between the two.

Duda wants to strengthen “the guarantee of sovereignty within the framework of national legislation”, as well as “counteract the natural tendencies to create a hierarchy inside the EU”, which makes him a potential ally of British Prime Minister David Cameron. Polish-British cooperation on EU matters has its limits, though, as Camer-

on is seeking to restrict the free movement of workers while Britain currently hosts more than 800,000 Polish migrants. On the other hand, Duda will need a strong support from the outside of the Eurozone to oppose further political integration (federalization) within the European Union, therefore it is in his personal interest that Britain stays in the EU. Unlike Cameron, Duda is not interested in leaving the European Union due to the fact that his main electorate, farmers and villagers, have strongly benefited on EU funding.

Pro-Atlantic orientation

Duda criticized pro-German orientation of Poland and said that he would seek to “recalibrate” Warsaw’s relations with Berlin to ensure the mutual relationship is not “at the expense of Polish interests”. In his opinion “the diplomacy between good neighbours doesn’t mean nodding one to another” as there are some issues, where Poland and Germany have common interest, but there are some others that they do not. These other issues include e.g. setting up NATO’s bases in Poland, Polish participation in the Normandy format, climate and energy.

Despite the fact that Poland has been Germany’s main business partner in Eastern Europe, Warsaw did not manage to influence Berlin’s politics and Chancellor Angela Merkel often took support from Poland for granted (e.g. on settling the Ukraine conflict). Moreover, Duda declared to follow the policy of former President Lech Kaczynski and seek alliances with countries of Central Europe, which may further lead to cooling relations with Germany, as it may undermine Germany’s economic domination over that part of the Old Continent.

New Polish President will prefer closer relations with the United States when it comes to security. Duda censured Germany and France for their role in negotiations with Russia and called for permanent NATO’s bases on Polish territory, with mixed Polish-American personnel. In his opinion, the results of NATO’s summit in Newport are insufficient and half-hearted, and increasing NATO’s presence in Poland should be one of the main priorities within President’s conception of Polish security strategy, which he named “Newport II”, though it will be difficult to accomplish given the potential cooling in relations with Germany.

On the other hand, Duda will oppose any plans to create the EU army, if it decreases the capabilities of NATO, what he admitted in the European Parliament in March 2015. Finally, Duda is expected to push for more concrete support to Ukraine at NATO’s summit in Warsaw in 2016, which he will host.

Traps on the eastern front

According to Andrzej Duda, Polish policy towards Ukraine has so far been passive and ineffective, and during the election campaign he declared that Poland would participate in the Normandy format on settling the conflict in Ukraine. Duda will definitely stay on the course to support Kyiv in its European aspirations and on the international arena. It is possible that he will also seek to provide military assistance to Ukraine from the international community.

Still, one should expect Duda to take a tougher stance on Ukraine when it comes to Volhynia massacre, especially since President Petro Poroshenko promised outgoing Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski to change the law on the legal status and commemoration of fighters for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century. Ukraine should bear in mind that historical policy will play a significant role during Duda’s presidency; therefore traumatic moments in Polish-Ukrainian history will be very often used by Russian media and Russian authorities to undermine mutual trust between Warsaw and Kyiv and sway the public opinion against Ukraine.

Without a doubt, new Polish President has got all what it takes to be the most anti-Russian head of state in the European Union: he will (not only in public) support Ukraine, push the EU to maintain its sanctions on Russia and demand increased NATO’s presence in Central Europe. It is almost impossible that Duda would pay any visit to Moscow until conflict in Ukraine is resolved.

Instead, one should expect Duda to raise the topic of Smolensk plane crash of 2010 and possibility of handing over to Poland a wreckage of a plane. It is likely that President Duda will ask the European Union to help Poland on that issue. Russia has by now used the topic of Smolensk to create divisions in Polish politics. In the mid-term Moscow will intentionally exploit that matter to undermine the position of Poland within the EU and NATO.

Conclusions

New Polish President Andrzej Duda will probably pursue more active foreign policy than his predecessor Bronislaw Komorowski. He will try to rebalance mutual relations between Poland and Germany, and seek a new opening with countries in Central Europe, following the path of former President Lech Kaczynski. He will also intensify cooperation with the United States on security matters.

When it comes to Polish eastern policy, Duda will continue policy of supporting Kyiv and try to engage in settling the conflict in Ukraine. Any significant shift in relations between Poland and Russia should be excluded.

The overall outcome of Duda's foreign policy will strongly depend on the results of upcoming parliamentary elections in Poland.

About the author:

Daniel SZELIGOWSKI, Analyst at Poland-Ukraine Research Centre Foundation, based in Poland; economist and political scientist. His main research interests include EU foreign policy, European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, European Union-Ukraine/Belarus/Russia relations and Polish foreign policy. Club of Gdansk – Polish-Russian Young Leaders Meeting Point member.

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