



KOMOROWSKI, PRESIDENT OF POLAND, A REAL TURNAROUND?

Bronisław Komorowski, the candidate of the Civil Platform liberal Party (PO), the Government majority party, has won the presidential ballot in Poland with 53% of the preferences as against 47% of Jarosław Kaczyński, the candidate of Law and Justice (PiS) and twin of the deceased President Lech, who died on 10th April, along with his wife Maria and another 94 people, high standing officials of the State and military apparatus, in a airplane crash at Smolensk in Russia. Lech was going to Katyn to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the massacre perpetrated secretly in the spring of 1940 by Stalin's secret police (a crime denied by the Soviets until Gorbaciov's brave admission in April 1990) against thousands of Polish officers held as prisoners of war. If it had not been for that tragic accident, the presidential elections, which had been set for next autumn, would not have been so gripping as to keep the Poles up for a long night with bated breath as they awaited the final outcome.

With the death of President Kaczyński, ready to join the running to be reconfirmed in his post, the electoral climate suddenly became incandescent. The candidature of his brother Jarosław, Prime Minister from 2005 to 2007, has brought a wind of uncertainty just when the candidate Komorowski was thought to be the winner by all the opinion polls. Although in Poland the President, even if directly elected by the people, does not have strong powers if not that of veto on the legislation and although in the autumn there will be local elections and in October 2011 the legislative ones, the electoral campaign has been politically highly connoted. Two factors have further contributed to a more structured and differentiated articulation of the main adversaries' political programmes. Just one month after the national drama of Smolensk, the country was hit by serious flooding. Following the torrential rain the two main rivers, the Vistula and the Oder, overflowed and flooded whole cities and villages causing the death of 20 people. Not even the capital Warsaw was saved. Polish public opinion was deeply moved by these further tragic events. The other salient element of the election campaign was foreign policy, with particular attention to Poland's relations with Russia and Germany.

Kaczyński shifted onto a more Left-wing position promising, as president, that he would put the veto on the reforms that could endanger the welfare state and guaranteeing "wealth for all," even if many remember that it was indeed the Jarosław government that abolished, for instance, the inheritance tax that allowed the various oligarchs (many of whom post-Communists and officially opposed by Kaczyński) to inherit or donate houses, properties and savings to their relatives.

On the international level, the PS candidate has sweetened the anti-German and anti-Russian tones that had characterised his government. However, Kaczyński has shown an unaltered attachment to the country's more traditional values and it is for this reason that the Polish Catholic Church has decidedly taken his side (K. Wiśniewska, *Kościół po wyborach*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 6-7-2010).

Komorowski has instead put himself forward as a liberal president and moderniser, ready to support female quotas (albeit limited to 35%) and, in agreement with the prime Minister and President of the PO Party Donald Tusk, to cut the balance deficit to 3% (from the 7% recorded last year) of GDP by 2012, to allow Poland to speed up its joining the Euro, and to restart the privatisation process with determination. In foreign policy Komorowski, in harmony with the Prime Minister, proposes a reconciliation with Russia and a strategic rapprochement with Germany and supports the withdrawal of Polish soldiers as soon as possible from Afghanistan. In terms of security, the preferential relationship with the United States remains, however, the priority, in spite of the tension following the review of the space shield project by Obama. It may not be a coincidence that on the eve of the ballot, the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was in Krakow to take part in the conference for the *10th anniversary of the Community of Democracies*, organised by the Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, and that she signed with the Polish government the agreement for the installation of a defensive antimissile shield in country. The United States thus still have a critical influence on Polish domestic politics.

The geographic distribution of the preferences of the Poles who performed the right of vote abroad has shown the generational and ideological split that is still being consumed in the post-Communist country and on which the new President, as he himself admitted as soon as he had confirmation of his election, will have to work in order to give the country unity and stability. The Poles

residing in the United States, many of whom emigrating in the Cold War climate, have supported the conservative and traditionalist Kaczyński, while the young post-Communist emigrants, who chose Europe as a destination and in particular Great Britain, have preferred the liberal and the pro-European Komorowski, whose election, however, at least for now, will not convince them to go back home. Also inside the country there has been a division: Komorowski has won in the provinces of the west and the north, including the capital, while Kaczyński has triumphed in the south and the east, in the most depressed areas where the agricultural sector continues to prevail, urbanization is less substantial, and the Russian proximity is perceived with greater fear (*Małopolska wolała Kaczyńskiego*, Rzeczpospolita, 5-7-2010). The percentage of turnout at the vote was, both in the first and the second round, around 55% with a slight increase as compared with the legislative elections in 2007 (54%), which instead becomes substantial as compared with the presidential election in 2005 (40%) when Lech Kaczyński's victory was also partly attributed to abstention.

The true revelation of these elections was, however, the success, in the first round, of the young candidate of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) Grzegorz Napieralski, who came third getting 13.7% of the preferences (Komorowski had received 41.2% and Kaczyński 36.7%). Napieralski was chosen by the SLD after the official candidate, the former Minister of Defence Jerzy Szmajdzinski, died at Smolensk. The recovery of the SLD, above all voted for by the young people attracted by liberal socialism and anti-clericalism, is a positive factor. For internal political dialectics it is essential to have a once again legitimate opposition after the scandals that had overwhelmed the Party in the past few years, and a generationally renewed opposition that has not had direct adjacency with Communism. At the ballot Napieranski, who could have taken advantage of the political fluidity to mature credit towards the PO to possibly be redeemed at the legislative elections in 2011, preferred not to side officially in favour of one of the two candidates (it is believed that 76% of the Left-wing electors have backed Komorowski and just 24% Kaczyński), thereby showing they are unwilling to accept compromises and murky machinations.

Thanks to the success, albeit narrow, at the Presidential elections, the PO will be able to choose "loyal" political leaders in key places (see the recent appointment Marek Belka, close to the government, to governor of the National Bank), and thus dominate the Polish political scene. The end of the agitated and

polarizing Kaczyński-Tusk cohabitation and the start of a more harmonious phase with the pair Komorowski-Tusk could give rise to a new reformist season in the country. There are, however, some factors that risk making this path impervious. In view of the legislative elections in the autumn of 2011, in concomitance with the EU presidency shift, the government will not be willing to adopt unpopular measures, putting off the implementation of more structural reforms till after the elections (theory of the political cycle). Furthermore, the slender margin of the victory at the Presidential elections does not advise embarking upon radical transformation that could have negative repercussions on the weaker classis, the PS's electoral base. Lastly, a corruption scandal, the so-called "Blackjack-gate," which emerged in October 2009 and led to the resignation of some PO leaders without, however, causing the fall of the government, might now have negative effects in concomitance with the end of the Parliamentary inquiry (B. Wildstein, *Afera hazardowa. Instrukcja obsługi*, Rzeczpospolita, 9-2-2010). Tusk's decision not to run for the presidency could be seen as a move to keep the government together in spite of the scandals (M. Młocka, *Tusk obudził potwora – swoją partię*, Rzeczpospolita, 15-2-2010).

The real turnaround for Poland could thus come about with the 2011 general elections, if the PO managed to take a certain lead over its rivals. In the meanwhile, the current leadership should be able to handle the knock-on effects if the economic crisis and revive growth. Poland is the country that within the EU is recording the most sustained growth, having been more resilient and less vulnerable than the other new Eastern members in respect to the contagion effects of the financial crisis at the end of 2008 (P. Lellouche, *Polska wzorem dla Europy*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5-5-2010). In view of the EU Presidency shift mandate, it is to be hoped that Poland will both persevere with a proactive and ductile foreign policy and that it will be the promoter of a new phase in Brussels-Moscow relations, with beneficial effect on European security as a whole.

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