

Agnieszka Lenart: How do you evaluate the results of the EP elections in your country?

In this essay I will elaborate on and evaluate the results of the EP elections in Poland. It is based on my personal opinion and as a result of that it is subjective to high extent. I will provide some data and try to find the reasons, why the winners won and why the others lost.

First, let's start with some data. The election took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> Mai 2019 and a vote was held to elect 52 delegates of Poland in European Parliament. There were 6 registered election committees in all 13 constituencies: Law and Justice (PiS), European Coalition, Spring, Left Together, Confederation and Kukiz'15. Turnout was the highest in history of EP elections in Poland and it reached 45% . And almost the same percentage of valid votes was in favour of Law and Justice and by this they won the elections, which means they got 27 seats in the EP. European Coalition got over 38% of votes, which means 22 seats. The last committee which crossed the threshold of 5% was Spring and their representatives got 3 seats in the EP.

Coming to my evaluation, I would like to stress the most positive thing in these elections, which is the turnout. Comparing to 23% in 2015 the number of 45% is really impressive. It means that the interest in politics on European level has doubled. The awareness of importance of the EU has doubled. It can be seen as a victory for each side, but considering the results rather Law and Justice has done their job managing to convince their supporters to go voting for them. I do not want to say that opposition (European Coalition) did not, but even if they did, it was not so effective.

On the other hand, the result of this election was embarrassing for many, including myself. According to official results one of five voters in age between 18-29 cast vote for Confederation. This committee consists of the most radical right-wing candidates, who represent nationalistic point of view. They have criticised Polish membership in the EU and supported the idea of Poxexit, which would mean the withdrawal of Poland from the European Union. The Confederation gained at all 4.55% and they did not cross the election threshold. Although many young people voted for them. This fact shows a great disappointment about current political situation in Poland among young people. Mainstream politics, endless fights of liberals and conservatives are no longer of interest for them, they cannot find right place in all this mess, so they look for alternatives. For me, it can be a sign that current politicians not being able to think out of the box cannot make laws beneficial for the new generation and the presence of younger politicians understanding their contemporaries in the EP is essential in order to serve all generations.

However, not everything can be deemed for positive or negative. The spectacular win of Law and Justice can be either their success or opposition's failure. In my opinion what is sure, they earned it. Their election campaign was a few times more visible and stronger than the opposition's one. They organised many meetings with electorate. They were rather country events, but actually this is, where their greatest support comes from. Although even according to Wikipedia, their position towards EU is soft Euroscepticism, in the months preceding elections, they pretended to be the greatest supporters of the EU. But before that they took out all the EU flags of their offices, broke the EU regulation a few times and accused other EU members of exploiting Poland unfairly. European Parliament is not a place for people, who want to destroy EU from inside. Afterall, they won and it was not surprising for Polish people. Since the elections in October, 2015, when they started ruling, they have increased social spending a few times. They gave people everything they had promised and much more. Law and Justice is seen as a populist party, but not by themselves. But this is unarguable true. Before the EP elections they had made a lot of promises. Social services are very important and for sure there is some point in part of increased spending of the government. However, some expenses are unexplainable, unless their explanation is to make people vote for the ruling party. But actually, this is how the democracy

works and since now no one has protested against it. Ruling party governs in such a way that people want them to remain being in charge. Obviously they are monitored by opposition. And if they make mistakes and spent public money unreasonable, the opposition should react, use the arguments and win next elections. So, what the opposition did during the EP elections and all this period of Law and Justice rule?

Honestly, there is not much to say about the opposition's activities. Since the 2014, as Civic Platform (PO) lost their leader because of departure of Donald Tusk to take up his post as president of the European Council, they are rather weak and invisible. They struggle to find direction. Lack of effective leadership is not the only problem. In the EP elections they run as one committee under the name of European Coalition with the high liberal Modern, the agrarian Polish People's Party and Democratic Left Alliance. Only considering names of allied parties it is not difficult to anticipate that there can occur some problems with creating the electoral programme. In this coalition there were parties from totally different fractions in the EP and with totally different priorities. For instance, Polish People's Party and Modern have different ideology in case of abortion, same-sex marriage/civil unions or in-vitro. Actually the parties could not agree on any important point of their agenda because of their contradictory world views. Their only common aim was to defeat Law and Justice and based on that it was not possible to create a reasonable electoral programme.

To sum up, it is easy to be wise after the event. The elections passed, but the Polish delegates will be in the EP for the next 4 years. Until now, Polish delegates are not popular in the EP. Beata Szydło, former prime minister from Law and Justice, was not chosen two times to become a head of the EP Committee on Employment and Social Affairs. The reason for this is a bad reputation of activities of Law and Justice in the EP. Other member countries do not trust them. It complicates Polish-EU relations and makes it difficult to pursue a policy, from which Poland could benefit. The choice of Polish citizens can be now questioned. But actually, did they have a choice? All in all, a bad plan is better than no plan.