



Dear Michał,

How is the pre-election atmosphere in Poland? Economically the country has been very successful in recent years. Still, not everybody seems to be happy or satisfied...



Over the last eight years alone, under the rule of the Civic Platform (PO), GDP per capita in 12 major regional capitals rose on average by 34%. This is more than 4% a year, which is more than impressive by European standards, especially given that these years were also marked by the worldwide financial crisis. Poland was the only EU country that even in 2008, only faced a slowdown of its growth – only 1.4% - but no crisis.

The improvement in infrastructure is visible on first sight – highways, streets, sidewalks, railroads, trains, trams, sport arenas, swimming pools, hospitals, etc. Still, many people are dissatisfied. They claim that growth was not distributed equally and many could see improvement around them, but not in their own salaries, households and living standards. No doubt, there is something to it: several social groups perceive themselves as losers, and some regions are underinvested.

One more factor should be taken into consideration. As we all know, voting behaviour is not only ruled by rational choice, but also by some unwritten rules. One of them is that people tend to get tired with the ruling party, however successful it may be, and the PO has been in charge for eight years already. There have been situations where it was perceived as arrogant, and many potential supporters might be disenchanted with this.

Discontent is also fuelled by anxiety. And paradoxically the integration of Poland in the European Union does not reassure the Poles, but contributes to their anxiety.

Of course, the vast majority of Poles are not blind: they are perfectly aware of the improvements in their lives which EU membership has brought. But at the same time, they experience a cultural fear, a serious anxiety with regard to the forces of globalisation. Some individuals and groups are afraid of losing their identity and community in the vague, borderless, frightening cosmopolitanism that the European Union also stands for.

The right-wing rhetoric exploits this anxiety by drawing a picture of a Poland that must 'defend' itself on all fronts: in the South against Islam, in the West against a demoralised, decadent Europe, and in the East against the eternal danger from Russia, now epitomised by Putin's aggressive politics. Besieged by all these enemies the lonesome fortress can only be defended by uncompromising 'patriots' gathered under the white-and-red flag. This is what the PiS has been rather successful in conveying to their voters. Still, it is difficult to believe that an absolute majority of Polish citizens will buy into this anti-liberal and fear-mongering ideology next Sunday.

Best wishes,

Michał

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