

By Malgorzata Tarasiewicz, NEWW, in Gdansk, Poland, 19/11/2007

Polish new rulers – will they deliver for women's rights?

The Civic Platform, the winning party in the 2007 parliamentary election in Poland, made a lot of promises before the elections to the Polish public. First of all - lower taxes, easier life for business people and quick economic growth. It did not promise anything in particular to women but nevertheless many women went to vote for the party of Donald Tusk. To be more precise, one can say that they voted not so much for Tusk but rather against the infamous Kaczynski "twins".

As a result, Poland is governed now, according to Magdalena Sroda, a feminist and a former Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men, by the "most anti-women and anti-feminist party running in the last elections - characterized by a complete lack of sensitiveness to gender issues, even amongst its women members. (...) They would do anything not to be suspected of feminism".

In the new government, women will play a much less important role than in the previous government. Also there will be fewer women in the new parliament (both chambers). Julia Pitera, one of the leading figures of the Civic Platform says that there is "nothing strange in the fact that men lead the most important ministries because they are better fit for such positions." According to Pitera, "the reason for that is a difference between women's and men's brains".

In the lower chamber of parliament, out of 460 seats only 93 are taken by women (19.7%). It is 5% less than after the previous election. The situation in the upper chamber of parliament is similar – out of one hundred seats only 9 belong to women. (Half the number of seats that women had after previous elections). Out of 209 new deputies of Civic Platform only 46 are women. The reason for that can be the fact that there were few women leading the voting list of the Civic Platform during the elections – 5 women on 41 lists.

Women's groups asked the new Prime Minister to appoint a Plenipotentiary for Equal Status for Women and Men and to meet them to discuss women's rights. Instead, the Civic Platform during one of the first sessions of the Parliament put a motion to liquidate the Parliamentary Committee for Family and Women's Rights. According to the Platform, there was not enough room in the parliamentary building to keep the Committee. Not surprisingly (since the Civic Platform has a majority in the Parliament) the Committee was liquidated.

Women's groups are still waiting for the answer of the Prime Minister concerning the Plenipotentiary. It is not clear if a meeting will ever happen since according to Stefan Niesiołowski, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament and a very influential Civic Platform politician: "The PM does not have time for nonsense and fictitious problems".

Abortion remains illegal in Poland, and for sure Civic Platform government is not going to change this. Right before being sworn in, the future government participated in a holy mass which was a clear sign to the public and to the church that the Catholic Church will remain an important partner for the new government.

Civic Platform's electoral slogan was "For a better living. For Everyone!" With time it will become clear if it has been meant really for everyone.