

Poland under fire

**Bad losers and unfriendly media internationalize Polish
internal row
Prime Minister Szydło holds her ground in European
Parliament**

Robert Strybel, Warsaw Correspondent

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WARSAW—Poland’s government has been in for some rough sledding recently, attacked on four sides by a feisty protest movement, the liberal-leftstream media, the European Union and the Standard & Poor’s credit-rating agency. Consequently, Polish leaders found themselves faced with the daunting task of setting things straight.

Poland’s conservative Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość = PiS) became the first Polish political party since 1989 to democratically win an outright majority in both houses of parliament and lost no time in carrying out a legislative marathon to fulfill its campaign promises. It also had a sympathetic president to sign the bills into law. But each measure affecting such questions as the Constitutional Court, civil service, police, public media and bank taxes triggered a huge uproar from supporters of the parties that lost the October elections.

The losers launched a self-styled Committee in Defense of Democracy (KOD) which week after week brought throngs of anti-government protesters into the streets. They ranted, chanted and waved placards calling the government a dictatorship, accusing it of violating the constitution and claiming democracy was in danger. Protest leaders also traveled to the EU capital Brussels to snitch on their country’s government and urge action against it.

The KOD version of events, promoted by influential anti-PiS media including liberal-leftist “Gazeta Wyborcza” (known as the Polish “New York Times”) and anti-government TVN television found a receptive audience in influential Western political and media circles. As a pro-Polish, pro-family and pro-Catholic party that favors the little guy over banks and corporations, PiS (pronounced “peace”) has had a hard time being heard in the West. views.

But the anti-government message did get through, prompting European Parliament Chairman Martin Schulz to call the situation in Poland “a Putin-style democracy” and order a debate on Poland’s alleged “violation of the rule of law”. Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło accepted the challenge and stood her ground at the European Parliament, based in the French city of Strasbourg.

In a calm but resolute voice Szydło refuted the accusations against her government and described the measures as the fulfillment of her party’s campaign pledges to voters. “We want the EU to understand that Poland, as a sovereign state, has the right to make internal decisions that serve the people,” she explained. The prime minister reiterated Poland’s commitment to the EU but added the 28-country bloc had far more important problems than Polish politics to deal with to mention only the refugee crisis.

Far from being an inquisition with Poland in the hot seat, the session turned into a spirited debate. Speakers representing the Polish anti-government Civic Platform party did criticize PiS’ behavior, but many European Parliamentarians from different countries supported Szydło’s position. Quite a few attacked the EU for meddling in Poland’s’ internal affairs and pointed out some of the bloc’s other failures and shortcomings.

In terms of crisis management, Polish leaders made a commendable effort, but continued misunderstandings cannot be ruled out. President Andrzej Duda met with

former Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, now chairman of the European Council, and the two men agreed that the fever-pitch emotions surrounding the “Polish situation” should definitely be toned down. “It is not in our country’s interest to continue the dispute in the European forum,” added Tusk, rumored to be considering a bid for the Polish presidency in 2020.

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Polish American Journal, Feb. 2016.
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