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Observation of the presidential election in Poland (18 May and 1 June 2025)

Election observation report
Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau
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1. Introduction

1. On 25 January 2025, the Speaker of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland announced that the presidential election would be held on 18 May 2025, with a possible run-off on 1 June 2025. On 30 January 2025, the Polish authorities formally invited the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to observe these elections.

2. At its meeting on 7 March 2025, the Bureau of the Assembly decided to set up a cross-party ad hoc committee, composed of 31 members and the two co-rapporteurs of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), to observe the presidential election in Poland. The Bureau appointed me as Chairperson of the ad hoc committee; however, due to colliding dates with elections in Romania, Ms Liliana Tanguy (France, ALDE) replaced me for the first round. The list of members of the ad hoc committee (PACE delegation) is set out in Appendix 1. For the second round, the Assembly deployed a reduced delegation of eight members, which I led.

3. The Assembly was invited to observe this election as Poland remains under the monitoring procedure. In line with the 2004 co-operation agreement between the Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), a representative of the Venice Commission joined the ad hoc committee as legal adviser. Mr Óscar Sánchez Muñoz provided a detailed legal analysis of the constitutional tensions, the independence of electoral oversight bodies, the functioning of the media and digital environment, campaign finance transparency, and inclusivity of persons with disabilities.

4. The PACE delegation recalls that Poland has signed and ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and its Additional Protocol (ETS No. 9), which enshrine fundamental principles crucial for democratic elections, including the right to free elections, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and prohibition of discrimination.

5. A two-day pre-electoral mission took place on 14-15 April 2025 in Warsaw (see Appendices 2 and 3). It concluded that the presidential election was taking place in a deeply polarised environment, marked by tensions between the president and the government, concerns over the independence of the judiciary, and risks of disinformation and foreign interference. The delegation emphasised the significance of this election for the stability of Poland's democratic institutions.

6. For the election itself, the PACE delegation worked from 16 to 20 May for the first round (Appendix 4) and from 30 May to 2 June for the second round (Appendix 6). It operated as part of an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) in close collaboration with a limited mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), headed by Ms Dunja Mijatović, which did not deploy any short-term observers. No other international parliamentary organisation participated in this process.

7. The IEOM concluded that the presidential election in Poland was competitive and well managed, but deeply affected by long-standing political polarisation, media bias, and continuing controversies regarding the independence of key oversight institutions. Both rounds respected fundamental freedoms, and election day was calm and professionally organised. However, ballot secrecy was not always ensured, campaign finance lacked transparency, and disinformation and foreign interference posed serious risks (see Appendices 5 and 7).

8. I convey our delegation's appreciation to the Polish delegation to the Assembly and its secretariat for assisting us in the preparation of this EOM and notably the pre-election mission, and to ODIHR's Head of Mission, Ms Dunja Mijatović, and her team for their constructive partnership.

2. Political landscape

9. The presidency in Poland is not merely symbolic. Although Poland is formally a parliamentary republic, the head of State wields significant powers, including the right to veto legislation and refer laws to the Constitutional Tribunal. In practice, this makes Poland's system closer to semi-presidentialism and gives the office of the president a central role in shaping the political balance. In recent years, outgoing President Andrzej Duda, aligned with the Law and Justice party (PiS), made extensive use of his veto powers to block reforms by the new Civic Coalition (KO)-led government, particularly efforts to restore judicial independence.

10. Poland's 2025 presidential election thus once again took place against a backdrop of deep political polarisation and unresolved institutional disputes that have defined the country since 2015. After nearly a decade of PiS rule, the parliamentary elections of December 2023 brought to power a new coalition led by Donald Tusk's Civic Platform (PO), together with Polish People's Party (PSL), Poland 2050, and New Left. This coalition promised to restore democratic standards and rebuild Poland's strained relations with the European Union (EU).

11. Central to this polarisation has been the rule-of-law crisis, which began in 2015 when PiS sought to reshape Poland's judiciary, including the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court. The PiS majority appointed judges in defiance of constitutional procedures, including three judges later found by the European Court of Human Rights to have been unlawfully appointed. The Tribunal subsequently became a political instrument, delivering rulings aligned with PiS priorities – among them the near-total abortion ban of 2020 and a 2021 judgment challenging the primacy of EU law. Its activity diminished sharply in later years, but the body continued to suffer from a lack of public trust, with surveys in 2024 showing confidence levels of barely 20%.

12. The crisis extended to the Supreme Court, where PiS-engineered changes politicised the National Council of the Judiciary (KRS), transferring appointment powers from judges to parliament. This allowed for the creation of a group of so-called "neo-judges," whose status has cast a shadow over thousands of judicial decisions, including sensitive electoral rulings. The establishment of new chambers within the Supreme Court, notably the disciplinary chamber, was used to intimidate judges critical of government policies. Although this chamber was formally abolished under EU pressure, concerns remain about judicial independence and the legitimacy of appointments made since 2018. The legitimacy of the Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs of the Supreme Court (also declared "not a tribunal established by law" by the European Court of Human Rights)[1] created further uncertainty over how potential disputes surrounding election results might be resolved.

13. The current government has questioned the legitimacy of several institutions and announced an action plan to restore the rule of law in Poland, including by reviewing the status of judicial nominations made between 2018 and 2023.[2] In the last two years, the Venice Commission issued several opinions on draft legislative reforms regarding the Polish judicial system.[3]

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1. In the case of *Dolińska-Ficek and Ozimek v. Poland* (judgment of 8 November 2021). https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%22itemid%22:[%22002-13490%22].

2. In its 2024 report, the European Commission concluded that in light of the new Action Plan on the Rule of Law being prepared to address long-standing concerns regarding judicial independence "there is no longer a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law by Poland" and withdrew its reasoned proposal of December 2017, thereby closing the Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union procedure for Poland. The Commission also decided to unblock funds previously withheld under the conditionality principle of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and cohesion funds under the Common Provisions Regulation.

3. See Urgent Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law of the Council of Europe on the draft law amending the Law on the National Council of the Judiciary of Poland, issued on 8 May 2024, pursuant to Article 14a of the Venice Commission's Revised Rules of Procedure, endorsed by the Venice Commission at its 139th Plenary Session (Venice, 21-22 June 2024) (CDL-AD(2024)018); Opinion on the draft

14. In January 2025, the Sejm passed a bill to transfer the authority of validating election results from the controversial Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs of the Supreme Court to a new body composed of the 15 most senior justices. On 10 March 2025, President Duda vetoed the bill, citing concerns about judicial independence and the potential impact on established appointments.

15. Many interlocutors at our pre-electoral and electoral missions emphasised the serious risk of a constitutional crisis if the election outcome came close and was contested, given the lack of a credible and independent judicial mechanism for resolving electoral disputes domestically.

16. Unable to pass comprehensive reforms, the government resorted to piecemeal measures: refusing to publish certain Constitutional Tribunal judgments, declining to recognise some "neo-judges," and issuing executive guidelines in areas such as abortion. This selective approach, while pragmatic, created inconsistencies that further undermined public confidence. A particularly visible example was the government's refusal to accept a tribunal ruling that would have increased pensions for 200 000 citizens, while simultaneously enforcing other decisions that bolstered its political position.

17. This unresolved rule-of-law crisis shaped the electoral climate in 2025 in two main ways. First, it sustained public mistrust in institutions: polls indicated that a majority of citizens believed the situation in the judiciary had worsened since 2023. This climate of disillusionment weakened support for the governing coalition and contributed to perceptions of broken promises. Second, it elevated judicial reform into a central dividing line of the presidential race. For many voters, the contest between Rafał Trzaskowski and Karol Nawrocki was as much about the future of Poland's courts and its relationship with the EU as about socio-economic policy. Karol Nawrocki's victory therefore reflected not only partisan dynamics but also widespread frustration with the slow pace of restoring the rule of law.

18. The stakes of the election were also shaped by a broader national security context. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has transformed Poland into a frontline State, hosting millions of refugees and facing heightened security threats. At the same time, the election process was also subject to multiple attempts at foreign interference, disinformation and cyberattacks before and during the electoral period.

19. Internally, this presidential election also marked the culmination of an intense electoral cycle in Poland, encompassing four separate elections within just eighteen months. During this period, approximately 30 million Polish voters repeatedly reshaped the country's political landscape, empowering liberal-leaning forces without completely side-lining the significance of the PiS and its coalition, the United Right. The local elections in April 2024 demonstrated that PiS remained the single largest political force, although the combined support of the three liberal coalitions backing Tusk secured overall victory. The European elections held in June 2024 marked a shift, as Tusk's PO overtook PiS, emerging as Poland's leading party in a nationwide poll for the first time in over a decade.

20. Yet far from inducing fatigue, this sequence of national, local and European elections produced strong democratic mobilisation: turnout reached 67.3% in the first round and 71.6% in the run-off, among the highest in recent decades. This underlined the strong civic commitment of the Polish people and their determination to shape their country's democratic future, despite the polarised environment and systemic challenges.

21. Furthermore, on 1 January 2025, Poland assumed the 6-month rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. "Security, Europe" was the motto of the Polish Presidency, motivated by the geopolitical reality of the erosion of the rules-based international order. It aimed to enhance Europe's external security by increasing defence readiness, raising military spending, and strengthening NATO co-operation, especially with the US, to reinforce transatlantic ties. Supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression was a priority, with efforts focused on maximising military, economic, and political assistance, advancing sanctions on Russia, and utilising frozen Russian assets. Poland also worked to advance EU enlargement, supporting candidate countries, alongside pursuing reforms on EU values, policies, budget, and governance. Internally, the presidency sought improved border protection and innovative migration solutions, addressing hybrid threats like migration instrumentalisation. It focused on information security, combating disinformation and foreign

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amendments to the Law on the Public Prosecutor's Office, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 140th Plenary Session (Venice, 11-12 October 2024) (CDL-AD(2024)034); Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law on European standards regulating the status of judges, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 140th Plenary Session (Venice, 11-12 October 2024) (CDL-AD(2024)029); Opinion on the draft constitutional amendments concerning the Constitutional Tribunal and two laws on the Constitutional Tribunal, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 141st Plenary Session (Venice, 6-7 December 2024) (CDL-AD(2024)035).

interference, particularly regarding democracy, climate, and environmental policies. Economically, Poland aimed for greater EU competitiveness, reduced bureaucracy, and an incentivised clean energy transition without Russian fossil fuels.

3. Key findings of the PACE delegation

3.1. Legal framework

22. The legal framework for presidential elections, built around the 1997 Constitution and the 2011 Election Code, is broadly consistent with democratic standards, but suffers from important deficiencies. Several key reforms long recommended by ODIHR and the Venice Commission remain unimplemented. These include measures to ensure full transparency of campaign finance, regulate third-party campaigning, strengthen safeguards against misuse of administrative resources, and improve inclusivity for voters with disabilities.

23. A central concern raised by many of our interlocutors was the unresolved conflict between the executive and the legislature. As already described in the previous chapter, the president's extensive use of veto powers has paralysed legislative reform, including reforms directly aimed at electoral safeguards. The result is that certification remained in the hands of a body – the Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs of the Supreme Court – whose legality is disputed, perpetuating public distrust.

24. Poland's legal framework provides for competitive elections, but persistent controversies surrounding the judiciary undermine public trust. The Constitutional Tribunal's legitimacy remains disputed after the 2021 European Court of Human Rights judgment in *Xero Flor w Polsce sp. z o.o. v. Poland*, which found that judges unlawfully appointed by PiS sat on the bench. Nevertheless, President Duda continued to refer legislation to this Tribunal, including electoral reform bills. This has paralysed attempts to broaden access to postal voting and clarify run-off procedures. The result is a legal environment in which critical reforms are stymied and public confidence in institutions eroded.

25. Efforts to transfer responsibility for validating election results away from the Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs of the Supreme Court, which the European Court of Human Rights also declared unlawful, were blocked by presidential veto. As a consequence, the body remained in place to adjudicate disputes, casting doubt over the impartiality of result validation. This perpetuated public concerns, especially in the tightly contested second round.

26. The Election Code regulates voter registration, candidate nomination, campaign conduct and dispute adjudication, but important gaps persist. These include inadequate safeguards for the secrecy of the ballot, insufficient transparency of campaign finance, and a lack of regulation on online campaigning. The Election Code lacks explicit articles as to the timeframes for the official second round campaign period and the ability to challenge the results of the first-round results in case of irregularities or offences affecting the outcome as complaints can only be filed after the announcement of the final election results. The Venice Commission expert stressed that these weaknesses, while not calling into question the democratic nature of the election, posed significant risks to its credibility.

3.2. Institutional framework

27. The institutional framework was marked by disputes over the composition and role of key bodies. The National Electoral Commission (NEC), reconstituted in March 2025, combined two judges (from the Constitutional Tribunal and Supreme Administrative Court) and seven parliamentary appointees, creating a balance that nonetheless reflected political influence. Five of these seven are from the governing coalition and two from PiS. This structure has been criticised as overly politicised, particularly after controversial NEC decisions on the allocation of public funds to PiS.

28. The National Broadcasting Council also remained politicised, with its composition unchanged since 2022 despite parliamentary rejection of its activity report. The Sejm voted in 2024 to reject its annual report, a decision which by law should have led to the dismissal of its members. President Duda refused, and the Council remained intact, further undermining its credibility

29. The administration of the election was technically professional. The NEC and its executive office met legal deadlines and provided prompt publication of detailed polling-station level results. This transparency was widely welcomed. However, the NEC's public communication was limited and non-systematic. Between the two rounds, it held only one in-person session.

30. At the operational level, election boards carried out their responsibilities professionally and efficiently. Polling station officials demonstrated commitment and competence, but their ability to address systemic issues, such as ballot secrecy or campaign finance transparency, was limited. The PACE delegation observed with appreciation the strong presence of women in election commissions, which reflects progress in inclusivity. Training, however, was reported to have been uneven, and last-minute replacements were sometimes insufficiently prepared.

3.3. Registration of voters and candidates

31. Voter registration in Poland is automatic and inclusive, with 28.8 million citizens eligible to vote in the run-off. Individuals could check and correct their entries, although voter lists were not made public. Voter lists were updated after the first round.

32. Voters who wished to be added to the voter list of a polling station abroad or on a ship or platform under the Polish flag could request to do so until 27 May 2025. A record number of some 695 000 voters registered to vote abroad. They could vote in the 511 polling stations in 91 countries.

33. The registration of candidates was also inclusive, with 44 committees established and 13 candidates approved for the first round. Four were rejected for failing to secure sufficient support signatures; one of these rejections was appealed unsuccessfully. While the process worked, verification mechanisms for signatures were not robust, leaving scope for abuse.

3.4. Electoral campaign

34. The campaign ahead of both rounds of the election was vibrant, competitive, and highly polarised, marked by rallies, televised debates, extensive social media activity, and strong grassroots mobilisation. While inflammatory rhetoric, including xenophobic and anti-Ukrainian messaging, was particularly pronounced during the first round, the overall tone softened somewhat ahead of the run-off. Nonetheless, divisive narratives targeting migrants, LGBTI people, and ethnic and religious minorities continued to feature in the discourse of parts of the right-wing supporters.

35. A major concern identified by all interlocutors was the blurring of lines between State functions and campaigning. Public officials, including ministers, governors and mayors, openly campaigned while in office, without attempts to enforce separation. This practice, seen across both major political camps, undermined equal opportunities for candidates and contravened international good practice. Shortly after the first round, President Andrzej Duda endorsed Karol Nawrocki, while Prime Minister Donald Tusk gave his backing to Rafał Trzaskowski. Almost all government ministers (24 out of 27) actively campaigned for Mr Trzaskowski, including on social media. At the local level, numerous mayors openly endorsed candidates, while opposition-controlled regions such as Podkarpackie provided official backing to Mr Nawrocki.

36. The campaign environment was further shaped by unequal media coverage, with public broadcasters accused of bias against one candidate, particularly in rural areas where public television remains the dominant source of information. While reforms were initiated by the new government to restore editorial independence at TVP and Polskie Radio, their impact was uneven and contested by the president as unconstitutional. This left many voters with limited access to balanced perspectives.

37. One of the most notable episodes of the campaign occurred a fortnight before the first round, when media revealed that Karol Nawrocki owned a second apartment, despite publicly presenting himself as an “ordinary Pole with one flat”. His campaign initially defended the arrangement as part of support for a disabled man residing there, but further reporting showed the beneficiary had been placed in a public care home by court order. The episode sparked criticism across the political spectrum, with rivals denouncing his actions as unethical. Karol Nawrocki announced he would donate the disputed flat to charity, but the gesture failed to restore public trust, with polls showing a decline in support. While his camp alleged a smear campaign by the secret services, journalists demonstrated that the information was publicly accessible through land registries.

38. Beyond scandals, the campaign was marked by high visibility in public spaces. Both candidates relied on banners, billboards, and large-scale rallies to mobilise supporters. One week before election day, Warsaw witnessed two massive parallel marches, reflecting the polarisation of the electorate. Campaign events were peaceful overall, though reports of destruction of campaign materials were widespread. Observers noted strong youth participation, with nearly 27% of attendees under 30, and women were actively involved both as organisers and voters.

39. Foreign officials and public figures also entered the campaign scene. Romania's president-elect Nicușor Dan endorsed Rafał Trzaskowski, while George Simion, a prominent Romanian nationalist politician, expressed support for Karol Nawrocki. In addition, US Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem voiced support for Karol Nawrocki during the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Rzeszów, demonstrating the international dimension of the campaign.

40. Social networks emerged as decisive tools for voter outreach. Both leading candidates doubled their online engagement between the first and second rounds, with weekly interactions on their posts reaching nearly half a million users. Online campaigning, however, was accompanied by disinformation, including third-party paid advertisements of unclear origin. The delayed designation of a Digital Services Coordinator limited institutional capacity to monitor and counter these threats. Despite some progress with EU-supported rapid response mechanisms, the lack of transparency in public reporting weakened public trust in institutions tasked with safeguarding electoral integrity.

3.5. Foreign interference

41. Despite frequent warnings about Russian interference in the Polish elections, experts and observers concluded that actual foreign interference had been less impactful than feared thanks to Poland's media diversity and recent legal/technical improvements. In addition, the unique historical context of Poland makes pro-Russian political stances deeply unpopular and practically impossible for credible political candidates. Russia's interference would therefore aim at creating chaos rather than supporting any specific candidate due to the unfeasibility of openly pro-Russian politics in Poland.

42. Nonetheless, foreign interference and information manipulation were persistent risks. The Polish authorities deployed significant resources to counter disinformation, cyberattacks, and co-ordinated campaigns from abroad, notably from Russia and Belarus. Systems were established for rapid response, including digital flagging and collaboration with social networks, though the effectiveness of these measures was uneven.

43. Observers identified delayed and inconsistent co-ordination between national bodies, civil society, and platforms. The late appointment of a Digital Services Coordinator hindered timely action under new EU rules. The PACE delegation noted the high-profile investigation into two third-party Facebook campaigns outspending official candidates with funds of unclear origin. Allegations of foreign backing, particularly for online ads supporting Rafał Trzaskowski, remain under review and contributed to tensions around transparency and trust.

44. Despite these efforts, the overall impact of foreign attempts appeared limited, with no credible evidence of outcome manipulation. However, the escalation of digital threats and the institutional sluggishness in response remain causes for concern, particularly as media and online mobilisation become ever more central in European elections.

3.6. Media landscape

45. Poland's media were highly polarised in both rounds of the presidential election, mirroring and amplifying political divisions. Public broadcasters and major private channels provided partisan coverage: TVP and TVN often criticised Karol Nawrocki and avoided negative reporting on Rafał Trzaskowski, while TV Republika adopted a strongly negative line against Rafał Trzaskowski. The regulatory body KRRiT, meanwhile, was widely perceived as politicised, reacting selectively to complaints and subject to audit criticism for failures in enforcement and impartiality.

46. The only official televised debate for the second round was poorly moderated, devolving into mutual accusations rather than substantive policy discussion. Both candidates benefited from additional airtime, but scheduling outside primetime restricted audience reach. Print and digital media tracked similar patterns, with editorial stances shaped by ownership and political affiliations.

47. Changes in public media management, triggered by parliamentary intervention, marginally improved reporting quality. However, unresolved questions related to funding, appointments, and statutory safeguards continued to expose public broadcasters to political influence. The proliferation of online news sources and social networks diversified information flows but increased exposure to disinformation and unregulated partisan campaigning.

3.7. Campaign financing

48. Campaign financing remains a critical weakness in Poland's electoral landscape. The cumulative expenditure limit for both rounds, set at PLN 24.6 million, created an uneven playing field for frontrunners needing to reserve resources. While donations above PLN 4 660 had to be disclosed, the bulk of funding – smaller donations and party transfers – escaped pre-election scrutiny or reporting.

49. Third-party campaigning, particularly online and through civil society organisations, operated outside regulatory requirements. Some non-party actors outspent official candidates, and allegations of foreign funding emerged as prominent issues. Investigations into suspicious advertisements remain ongoing, but the NEC has no authority to halt or sanction violations before the conclusion of the process.

50. Financial reports from candidates are only required several months after the election, and the format for publication limits accessibility and review. These delays prevent real-time accountability, undermining public scrutiny and trust. Parties continue to seek loopholes in disclosure rules, making transparency and integrity in campaign financing an urgent area for reform.

3.8. Women and inclusivity in the electoral process

51. The 2025 presidential election highlighted persistent gender imbalances in political participation. Unlike the 2023 parliamentary elections, which saw a surge of female candidates and strong mobilisation of women voters, this contest featured only two female presidential candidates. Civil society organisations and observers widely regretted this, noting the persistent gender imbalance in political leadership, underlining that it limited political pluralism and deprived the electorate of perspectives crucial for debates on equality and social rights. The composition of the NEC reflected similar disparities, having an all-male composition.

52. Women were, however, central to the organisation of election day. They constituted a large proportion of polling station commission members, ensuring orderly procedures and contributing to voter confidence in the process. Our observers commended their professionalism and noted the vital role women played at grassroots levels of electoral administration. At the same time, civic actors highlighted that those younger women, who had been highly mobilised in the 2023 parliamentary elections around issues of reproductive rights and societal liberalisation, appeared less engaged in this presidential race. Frustration with the Tusk government's cautious pace on gender equality reforms contributed to this disillusionment.

53. The inclusivity of the electoral process also depended on measures to ensure access for people with disabilities. The Election Code foresees free transport for voters with disabilities and those over 60, as well as assisted voting. While some polling stations were well adapted, accessibility remained uneven, with architectural barriers and inconsistent availability of information in accessible formats. Civil society and the Ombudsperson's office ran a campaign under the motto "Elections accessible to all," which raised awareness but did not fully address structural shortcomings. ODIHR observers noted that much more remains to be done to guarantee equal, independent, and secret voting rights for persons with disabilities.

4. Election Day

54. On election day, the Assembly's observers were deployed across a wide geographical spread. In the first round, 15 teams visited 153 polling stations across regions including Gdańsk, Kraków, Białystok, Lublin, Pułtusk, Ostrołęka, Siedlce, Ostrów Mazowiecki, Ciechanów, Płońsk, Radom, Łódź and Warsaw. In the second round, teams visited polling stations in Warsaw, Łowicz–Kutno, Białystok, Puławy and Lublin. This coverage gave the delegation a broad overview of the process across urban and rural Poland.

55. The Assembly observers congratulated the Polish electorate on the exceptionally high turnout, both within the country and among citizens voting abroad (67.31% in the first round and 71.63% in the second round). Despite a deeply polarised political climate, voters demonstrated their commitment to democratic principles and contributed to a calm and orderly electoral process. The conduct of polling station staff was widely praised, with some 31 000 polling stations operating nationwide in a generally professional and transparent manner. A notable feature of the process was the very strong participation of women, who were present in significant numbers on electoral boards and contributed actively to the smooth administration of the vote.

56. Election day in both rounds was calm, efficiently and professionally managed across observed polling stations. The technical aspects of voting, counting, and tabulation were implemented effectively, and no major irregularities were reported.

57. A recurring challenge was the secrecy of the vote. Observers found repeated instances of family voting, picture-taking of ballots, and group voting, raising concerns about privacy and individual autonomy. While understandable in cultural terms, international standards underscore that secrecy of the vote is a cornerstone of democratic elections. The Polish authorities therefore have a duty to provide conditions that enable every voter to exercise their franchise in privacy and free from undue social or political pressure, regardless of whether they live in urban centres or rural areas.

58. Long lines for absentee certificates reflected heavy use of this mobilisation tool, but the process generally worked as intended. No intimidation or forced voting was observed, and election officials respected both the spirit and letter of procedures.

5. Election results

59. The first round on 18 May confirmed a fragmented, high-stakes contest that concentrated the field around two sharply defined alternatives. Rafał Trzaskowski led with 31.36%**,** Karol Nawrocki placed second with 29.54%**,** and the third and fourth places went to Sławomir Mentzen (14.81%) and Grzegorz Braun (6.34%), with the remaining candidates receiving each below 5% of the votes. These figures underscored how decisively the electorate had split between a liberal-centrist platform focused on institutional reform and European alignment and a conservative-national platform emphasising sovereignty and social traditionalism.

60. The run-off on 1 June was decided by a razor-thin national margin**.** Karol Nawrocki won the presidency with 50.89% (10 606 877 votes) to 49.11% (10 237 286 votes) for Rafał Trzaskowski – a difference of 369 591 votes out of more than 20.8 million valid ballots. This outcome, reached amid very high participation (71.63% turnout), confirmed the depth of Poland's two-camp politics while producing a clear, if narrow, mandate for the president-elect.

61. Who voted for whom exhibits the now-familiar urban–rural and education gradients. Late-poll demographic data show Karol Nawrocki winning rural areas by 64.2% to 35.8%, while Rafał Trzaskowski took the biggest cities (>500,000 residents) by 66.8% to 33.2% and also led across medium-sized urban centres. By education, Karol Nawrocki led among voters with elementary (73-27) and vocational (70-30) education, while Rafał Trzaskowski led among higher-education voters (61-39); secondary-education voters were more evenly split. Gender patterns were also visible: men leaned toward Karol Nawrocki (55.5-44.5), while women leaned toward Rafał Trzaskowski (52.8-47.2). These cleavages, widely visualised in the post-election "run-off in charts" analyses, map closely onto Poland's broader social geography.

62. Voting abroad reached exceptional levels and differed markedly from the domestic pattern. According to official tallies, the second-round abroad electorate counted 721 608 registered voters, with 608 043 valid ballots and 84.26% turnout. Across 511 overseas polling stations, Rafał Trzaskowski won the diaspora by 63.49% to 36.51%, receiving approximately 383 700 votes to 220 600 for Karol Nawrocki – significant margins in the UK, Germany, the US and Western Europe that, while substantial, were insufficient to outweigh Karol Nawrocki's rural and south-eastern strength at home.

63. The political implications of such a close and polarised result are considerable, notably as in Poland's political system, the president wields significant powers, including the power to initiate legislation, appoint senior officials and, above all, the power to exercise a legislative veto and the ability to refer laws to the Constitutional Tribunal. International observers had already warned that the election outcome could affect the government's capacity to implement its rule-of-law agenda. The result confirms those concerns and signals a period of protracted bargaining between the executive and legislature, with consensus-building becoming a necessity.

64. On 6 August 2025, Karol Nawrocki was sworn in as president for a five-year term. Although formally independent, his campaign was openly backed by PiS, and his victory gives the party a powerful ally at the apex of the State, notably through his power to exercise a suspensive veto. Given the coalition arithmetic in the Sejm, where the government lacks the majority needed to override vetoes, his election represents a formidable constraint on Tusk's ambitions.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

65. The International Election Observation Mission (representing the Assembly and ODIHR) concluded that the 2025 presidential election in Poland was competitive, well managed and gave voters a genuine choice. Election day was calm and professional, and the very high turnout confirmed the strong democratic

commitment of Polish citizens. At the same time, long-standing political polarisation, biased media coverage, misuse of official resources, insufficient transparency of campaign finance, and persistent concerns over judicial independence limited the overall confidence in the process.

66. The PACE delegation underlined that the Polish people deserve full trust in their democratic institutions. It stressed that political leaders should engage in inclusive dialogue to overcome divisions and strengthen the trustworthiness of the system.

67. Based on its findings, the delegation encourages the Polish authorities to implement in full the recommendations of the Venice Commission and ODIHR, particularly concerning judicial independence, transparency of campaign financing, and the regulation of third-party campaigning.

68. The PACE delegation encourages the Polish authorities to, as regards:

– legal framework:
  - clarify procedures for run-off campaigns, including timelines and complaint mechanisms;
  - reform the process for validating election results to remove it from bodies deemed illegitimate by the European Court of Human Rights;
  - address contested appointments to the Constitutional Tribunal to restore confidence;
  - implement the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights with regard to the independence of the judiciary, including with regard to the contested chambers of the Supreme Court and appointments to the Constitutional Tribunal in order to restore confidence in the independence and impartiality of the justice system;
– institutional framework:
  - reform the composition of the National Electoral Commission to reduce politicisation and enhance independence;
  - ensure consistent, comprehensive training of election commissions across the country;
  - guarantee judicial independence in electoral matters through systemic reform;
– media:
  - safeguard editorial independence of public broadcasters and ensure balanced coverage;
  - reform the National Broadcasting Council to ensure impartiality and accountability;
  - ensure fair, substantive debates with impartial moderators;
– campaign finance:
  - introduce real-time disclosure of income, expenditures and party transfers;
  - establish effective sanctions for illegal third-party campaigning;
  - publish full donor information and audits in accessible formats;
– misuse of administrative resources:
  - enforce a strict separation between public office and campaigning;
  - prohibit the use of public resources, events and staff for campaign purposes;
– foreign interference and digital realm:
  - fully implement the EU Digital Services Act and strengthen co-operation with platforms;
  - expand the “Election Umbrella” initiative with clear enforcement mechanisms;
  - improve co-ordination and timely public communication to counter disinformation;
– election day:
  - safeguard ballot secrecy with envelopes or redesigned boxes, and voter education;
  - ensure universal accessibility for persons with disabilities;
  - monitor potential intimidation linked to volunteer “protection” groups;

– participation and inclusivity:

  - remove restrictions on suffrage for persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities;
  - promote gender balance in the National Electoral Commission and electoral commissions;
  - support citizen observation consistent with international standards.

69. The Assembly encourages the authorities of Poland to address these shortcomings in the spirit of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy adopted at the Council of Europe Summit in 2023, which reaffirm the importance of free and fair elections for democratic resilience. It stands ready to assist Poland in pursuing these reforms through its monitoring procedure and in close co-operation with the Venice Commission.

Appendix 1 – Composition of the ad hoc committee

Chairperson: Mr Iulian BULAI, Romania, replaced by Ms Liliana TANGUY, France, for the observation of the first round of the presidential election in May.

Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC)

– Ms Zita GURMAI, Hungary
– Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES, Spain
– Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA, North Macedonia * **
– Ms Annick LAMBRECHT, Belgium
– Mr Perran MOON, United Kingdom
– Ms Sandra REGOL, France
– Mr Axel SCHÄFER, Germany
– Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austria
– Mr Roberto SPERANZA, Italy

Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)

– Ms Deborah BERGAMINI, Italy
– Mr Pablo HISPÁN, Spain
– Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN, Armenia
– Mr Joseph O'REILLY, Ireland *
– Mr Georgios STAMATIS, Greece

European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates (ECPA)

– Mr Simone BILLI, Italy
– Ms Elisabetta GARDINI, Italy *
– Mr Armen GEVORGYAN, Armenia **
– Mr Malte KAUFMANN, Germany
– Ms Jessica STEGRUD, Sweden
– Ms Victoria TIBLOM, Sweden

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

– Mr Iulian BULAI, Romania * **
– Mr Alfred HEER, Switzerland
– Ms Yuliia OVCHYNNYKOVA, Ukraine
– Ms Lucia PLAVÁKOVÁ, Slovak Republic
– Ms Liliana TANGUY, France
– Ms Lesia ZABURANNA, Ukraine

Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)

– Ms Laura CASTEL, Spain *
– Ms Sevim DAĞDELEN, Germany ** (replaced Ms Castel for the second round)

Co-rapporteur AS/MON (ex officio)

– Mr Pieter OMTZIGT, Netherlands, EPP/CD

Venice Commission

– Mr Oscar SÁNCHEZ MUÑOZ, Spain, member of the Venice Commission **
– Mr Michael JANSSEN, secretariat of the Venice Commission **

Secretariat

– Ms Sylvie AFFHOLDER, Head of the Elections Division **
– Ms Ivi-Triin ODRATS, Deputy Head of the Elections Division *
– Ms Carine ROLLER-KAUFMAN, Assistant, Elections Division * **
– Ms Agata MASELKO-SOKOL, Expert Consultant * **

*Participants to the pre-electoral mission

**Participants to the second round

Appendix 2 – Programme of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

Monday, 14 April 2025

09:00-10:00	Delegation meeting with introductory words by: – Mr Iulian Bulai, Head of Delegation – Ms Karina Wegrzynowska, Head of the Council of Europe Liaison Office in Warsaw
10:00-11:30	Meeting with representatives of civil society organisations: – Ms Zofia Lutkiewicz, Political Accountability Foundation – Mr Marcin Wolny, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights – Mr Michał Leśniak, Committee for the Defence of Democracy – Mr Krzysztof Izdebski, Stefan Batory Foundation – Ms Sonia Horonziak, Institute of Public Affairs – Mr Marcin Skubiszewski, Election Observatory
11:30-12:30	Meeting with Prof. Wojciech Brzozowski, Deputy Human Rights Commissioner
13:00-14:15	Working lunch with Mr Stanisław Zakroczymski**,** Director General of the Office of the Speaker of the Sejm
14:30-16:00	Meeting with: – Ms Dunja Mijatović, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM) – Mr Stefan Krause, Deputy Head of the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM – Ms Martina Barker-Ciganikova, ODIHR Election Adviser responsible for Poland
16:15-17:15	Meeting with a representative of media outlet, Mr Andrzej Krajewski, Journalists' Association
17:30-18:30	Meeting with: – Ms Henryka Mościcka - Dendys, Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland – Ms Justyna Chrzanowska, Director of the Department of Consular Affairs, Plenipotentiary of the Ministry for the 2025 presidential election – Ms Agata Duda-Płonka, Deputy Director of the Department of Global Affairs; – Mr Piotr Chmiel, Deputy Director of the Department of Consular Affairs – Mr Michal Zawisza, Head of the Legal Department of the Consular Department – Mr Pawel Wierdak, advisor (former Head of the Council of Europe Liaison Office in Warsaw)

Tuesday, 15 April 2025

10:00-10:45	Meeting with: – Mr Sylwester Marciniak, Chairperson of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) – Mr Paweł Gieras and Mr Arkadiusz Pikulik, members of the NEC – Mr Rafał Tkacz, Chairperson of the National Electoral Office
11:15-12:00	Meeting with: – Mr Krzysztof Wiak, Judge, President of the Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs of the Supreme Court – Mr Oktawian Nawrot, Judge at the Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs of the Supreme Court – Mr Aleksander Stępkowski, Judge, Spokesperson of the Supreme Court – Mr Marcin Stębelski, member of the Supreme Court Studies and Analysis Office – Mr Przemysław Szuty, assistant to Judge at the Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs of the Supreme Court
12:30-13:15	Meeting with Mr Rafał Rosiński, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Digital Affairs
13:30-14:30	Working lunch with Mr Robert Kwiatkowski, member of the National Media Council

15:00-17:45	Meeting with representatives of the presidential candidates: – 15:00-15:30 Mr Gregory Woztowicz, member of the campaign team of Mr Rafał Trzaskowski (KO), Chairperson of the Polish Delegation to PACE – 15:45-16:15 Mr Marcin Przydacz, MP, former MFA Undersecretary of State, member of the campaign team of Mr Karol Nawrocki (PiS) – 16:30-17:00 Mr Arkadiusz Waszkiewicz, representative of the electoral campaign of Ms Magdalena Biejat (The Left) – 17:15-17:45 Mr Jacek Cichocki, Head of the electoral team of Mr Szymon Hołownia
18:00-19:30	Debriefing meeting of the pre-electoral delegation and preparation of the statement

Appendix 3 – Statement of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

PACE pre-election mission to Poland: Wide voter choice amid concerns over polarisation, electoral integrity and security

Warsaw, 15 April 2025 – A five-member delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), led by Iulian Bulai (Romania, ALDE), concluded a two-day pre-election visit to Warsaw ahead of the presidential election scheduled for 18 May 2025.

The delegation acknowledged significant positive developments since the parliamentary elections in 2023, notably the expectation of a professionally administered electoral process, active engagement from civil society – including extensive domestic observation – and increased public scrutiny, demonstrating robust democratic engagement. However, the mission also noted a degree of voter fatigue, as this election concludes an intensive cycle of four consecutive electoral contests.

Despite these encouraging developments, several challenges remain. Political polarisation continues to impede essential electoral reforms, notably concerning judicial independence, transparency in campaign financing, and impartial media coverage. The delegation particularly highlighted concerns over the politicised composition of election administration bodies and questioned judicial institutions' capacity to impartially manage electoral disputes, both inherited from the previous government.

Further concerns include intense and divisive campaign rhetoric, inadequate oversight of campaign financing, and the potential for biased reporting by public broadcasters. Additionally, interlocutors underscored the challenges of potential cyberattacks and possible foreign interference, emphasising the necessity of continued vigilance against hybrid threats that could affect the electoral process.

While welcoming the planned opening of over 500 polling stations worldwide to facilitate out of country voting, concerns were raised about delays in the reintroduction of postal voting, which might disenfranche some members of the electorate.

Transparency in campaign financing emerged as another area requiring attention. Many interlocutors voiced concerns about inadequate oversight mechanisms and unresolved issues regarding public funding allocation for campaigns. The lack of interim reporting prior to election day and limited regulation of third-party campaigning were identified as gaps that could hinder accountability and transparency.

The media environment also reflects broader political polarisation. Interlocutors emphasised ongoing reforms aimed at protecting editorial independence and promoting media pluralism but noted that public broadcasters remain under scrutiny for potential bias in their reporting. While provisions exist for debates among presidential candidates and free airtime for campaign spots, systematic monitoring of media compliance with electoral obligations is lacking, which could affect balanced coverage during the campaign period.

The PACE delegation underscored that a transparent and inclusive electoral process is essential for maintaining public trust in democratic institutions. It called on all stakeholders to address these concerns proactively and ensure that Polish citizens can exercise their democratic rights freely and fairly during this pivotal election.

The cross-party delegation met with high-ranking state officials, members of the judiciary, electoral authorities, representatives of political parties, civil society organisations and independent media monitors to thoroughly assess the electoral environment and broader political climate.

A full PACE observation mission will return to Poland in mid-May to monitor developments on election day and beyond.

PACE – which represents parliamentarians from 46 European nations – is observing elections in Poland with a full-scale delegation for the second time since the Parliamentary Assembly decided to open a procedure in January 2020 to monitor Poland’s honouring of its statutory obligations in respect of the Council of Europe.

* Composition of the delegation: Iulian BULAI (Romania, ALDE) Head of Delegation, Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA, (North Macedonia, SOC), Joseph O’REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD), Elisabetta GARDINI, (Italy, ECPA), Laura CASTEL, (Spain, UEL)

Appendix 4 – Programme of the meetings of the PACE electoral observation mission (1st round)

Friday, 16 May 2025

09:00-10:20 PACE delegation meeting
- Welcome by Mr Iulian Bulai, Head of delegation
- Presentation of the political and electoral environment, Ms Agata Masełko-Sokoł, expert-consultant assisting the PACE election observation missions (EOM)
- Presentation on electoral legislation and legal challenges, Mr Óscar Sánchez Muñoz, representative of the Venice Commission
- Presentation by Mr Pieter Omtzigt, PACE monitoring committee co-rapporteur on Poland
- Practical information from the secretariat

10:30-12:30 Briefing by the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM)
- Mr Stefan Krause, Deputy Head of Mission

Political overview, the contestants and the election campaign
- Ms Tatyana Hilscher Bogussevich, Political Analyst
- Ms Elissavet Karagiannidou, Campaign Finance Analyst
- Mr Egor Tilpunov, Media Analyst

Legal Framework, Electoral dispute resolutions
- Mr Donald Bisson, Legal Analyst
- Ms Desislava Hristova, Election Analyst
- Mr Noah Lane, Security Expert

14:00-15:30 Political and Social Context – representatives of the civil society
- Ms Zofia Lutkiewicz, Political Accountability Foundation
- Mr Michał Leśniak, Committee for the Defence of Democracy
- Mr Krzysztof Izdebski, Stefan Batory Foundation
- Ms Sonia Horonziak, Institute of Public Affairs

16:00-17:00 Election Administration
- Ms Henryka Mościcka-Dendys, Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland
- Mr Rafał Rosiński, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Digital Affairs
- Mr Sylwester Marciniak, Chairperson, National Electoral Commission
- Mr Rafał Tkacz, Chairperson, National Electoral Office

17:15-18:15 Election Campaign and Media Coverage
- Ms Dominika Sitnicka, OKO Press
- Mr Juliusz Kaszynski, Editor-in-chief, Polish Radio
- Mr Jakub Szymik, CEE Digital Democracy Watch

Saturday, 17 May 2025

09:30-11:30 Representatives of the presidential candidates
- 09:30-10:10 Mr Paweł Jabłoński, representative of the electoral campaign of Mr Karol Nawrocki (PiS)
- 10:10-10:50 Mr Arkadiusz Waszkiewicz, representative of the electoral campaign of Ms Magdalena Biejat (The Left)
- 10:50-11:30 Ms Zofia Malisz, representative of the electoral campaign of Mr Adrian Zandberg (Together)

11:45-12:30 Representatives of the presidential candidates (continued)
- Ms Wioletta Paprocka-Ślusarska and, Ms Dorota Łoboda, representatives of the electoral campaign of Mr Rafał Trzaskowski (KO)

12:30-13:15	OSCE/ODIHR EOM briefing continuation – Ms Ivana Stanojev, long-term observer co-ordinator deployed in Warsaw

Sunday, 18 May 2025, Election Day – Observation in polling stations

(polling stations open at 7:00 and close at 21:00)

Monday, 19 May 2025

08:00-09:00	Debriefing for the PACE delegation
15:00	Joint ODIHR/PACE press conference

Appendix 5 – Press release of the international election observation mission (first round)

Poland's presidential election was competitive but affected by deep polarization, international observers say

WARSAW, 19 May 2025 – The first round of Poland's presidential election offered voters a genuine choice between political options, but it took place against a background of deep political polarization that also impacted some key state institutions involved in the electoral process, international observers said in a statement today.

The joint observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) found that the electoral legal framework is adequate to hold democratic elections. However, some aspects would benefit from further revision as many prior recommendations remain unaddressed. Concerns were raised about the independence of the judiciary, including the court chamber responsible for validating election results, potentially weakening public trust.

"The election campaign so far has demonstrated Poland's strength as a dynamic democracy, but to strengthen it further the deep trenches of political polarization must be addressed through inclusive dialogue that bridges political and ideological divides," said Dunja Mijatović, who headed the ODIHR observation mission. "At the same time, the inflammatory messaging by some candidates that targeted migrants, the LGBTI community, and ethnic and religious groups, including xenophobic and anti-Ukrainian overtones, raised serious concern."

The authorities took largescale and proactive efforts to protect the election process from multiple attempts at foreign interference, disinformation, and cyberattacks, but the co-ordination between the institutions working in this area as well as public communication about the protective measures used require further strengthening. While attempted cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns surged in the run-up to the election, state institutions said they had identified and mitigated these threats.

"The first round of Poland's presidential election was professionally managed, but deep political divisions, unresolved constitutional crises, weak safeguards against campaign abuses and foreign interference from Russia and others threaten the integrity of the process," said Liliana Tanguy, Acting Head of the PACE Delegation. "As the country heads into the second round, it is a pivotal moment for all stakeholders to strengthen transparency and uphold democratic standards, and for all Polish citizens to make their voices heard in shaping the nation's democratic future."

The election administration managed the election efficiently at all levels, but its decision-making process was not always transparent. Election day itself was calm and the process was professional and well organized, but the secrecy of the vote was often not ensured.

The freedoms of expression, assembly and association were respected in a vibrant campaign. While the interaction between candidates was mostly respectful, at times the campaign tone turned personal and confrontational. Intolerant messaging targeting vulnerable communities was also observed, including online. In the absence of sufficient regulation, public officials at various levels and across the political spectrum frequently campaigned on behalf of candidates, and the line between official duties and campaign activities often appeared blurred. Women remain underrepresented in public and political life and their involvement as speakers at campaign events and in campaign leadership remained limited. Only two out of the 13 presidential candidates were women.

While there have been some recent improvements to media freedom, including a reduction in litigation against journalists, the media landscape remains highly polarized, limiting voters' access to impartial information. ODIHR's media monitoring found clear patterns of biased coverage across both public and private outlets. Overall, the limited access of voters to comprehensive information needed for making a fully informed choice highlighted the need for systematic media reforms.

The international election observation to the Polish presidential election totalled 67 observers from 30 countries, consisting of 34 ODIHR-deployed experts and long-term observers, and 33 parliamentarians and staff from PACE.

Appendix 6 – Programme of the meetings of the of the PACE electoral observation mission (second round)

Saturday, 31 May 2025

09:00-10:00 PACE delegation meeting
- Welcome by the Head of delegation, Mr Iulian Bulai
- Presentation of the political and electoral environment after the 1st round, Ms Agata Masełko-Sokoł, expert-consultant assisting the PACE electoral observation mission (EOM)
- Presentation on electoral legislation and election dispute resolution, Mr Óscar Sánchez Muñoz, representative of the Venice Commission
- Practical information from the secretariat

10:00-11:30 Briefing by the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM)
- Welcome and overview of the LEOM's work between the two rounds, Dunja Mijatović, Head of Mission and Stefan Krause, Deputy Head
- Political overview, the contestants and the election campaign, Ms Tatyana Hilscher Bogussevich, Political Analyst
- Media monitoring, Mr Egor Tilpunov, Media Analyst
- Election Administration and E-Day, Ms Desislava Hristova, Election Analyst

11:30-12:15 Media and campaign monitoring
- Ms Alexandra Wojtowicz, disinformation expert, CEE Digital Democracy Watch

14:00-15:00 Election administration
- Mr Sylwester Marciniak, Chairperson, National Electoral Commission
- Mr Rafał Tkacz, Chairperson, National Electoral Office

15:10-16:30 Representatives of the presidential candidates

15:10-15:50 Ms Wioletta Paprocka-Ślusarska and Ms Dorota Loboda, representatives of the electoral campaign of Mr Rafał Trzaskowski (KO)

15:50-16:30 Mr Paweł Jabłoński, representative of the electoral campaign of Mr Karol Nawrocki (PiS)

Sunday, 1st June 2025, Election Day – Observation in polling stations

(polling stations open at 7:00 and close at 21:00)

Monday, 2 June 2025

08:00-09:00 Debriefing for the PACE delegation

15:00 Joint ODIHR/PACE press conference

Appendix 7 – Press release of the international election observation mission (second round)

Poland's presidential run-off well run and intensely contested amid increased polarization including in media and online, international observers say

WARSAW, 2 June 2025 – Yesterday's presidential run-off in Poland was competitive and well managed, but the longstanding polarization between the country's two main political camps and media bias contributed to an intensely contested campaign amidst ongoing controversies over the independence of some key electoral oversight institutions, international observers said in a statement today.

The joint observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) concluded that as in the first round, the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly were respected ahead of the presidential run-off. While the campaign became increasingly confrontational as both candidates competed for the votes of a divided and ideologically fragmented electorate, the use of inflammatory and intolerant messaging declined noticeably ahead of the second round. In the absence of explicit rules or legislation, there was no clear separation between campaigning and the activities of public officials, and no efforts were made to prevent or stop such practices.

"The entire campaign exposed the depth of Poland's political polarization and societal divisions, underscoring the need for an inclusive dialogue that involves the whole society," said Dunja Mijatović, head of the ODIHR observation mission. "Political leaders must now further strengthen the trustworthiness and accountability of Poland's democratic institutions for the benefit of all citizens. Genuine democracy should not be a zero-sum game, it is a shared responsibility."

While the authorities maintained their efforts to protect the election process from disinformation and foreign interference, these efforts were weakened by insufficient coordination as well as limited and contradictory public communication about the measures taken. The effectiveness of responses by the social networks continued to vary significantly, resulting in a high share of flagged content remaining unaddressed on some platforms.

"The high voter turnout in the second round of the presidential election, both domestically and abroad, reflects the strong commitment of Polish citizens to the strength and quality of their democracy," said Iulian Bulai, head of the PACE delegation. "Voters were presented with a real choice between political alternatives in an open environment. They were able to make informed decisions despite a highly polarised media landscape, manipulative rhetoric and existing vulnerabilities, which should be addressed to further strengthen the integrity of the electoral process."

Inadequate campaign finance regulations enabled the frequent involvement of third parties, reducing accountability and the integrity of the process. Overall, the election administration managed the election professionally and efficiently. Election day itself was calm and the process was well organized and professional, but as for the first round, the secrecy of the vote was often not ensured.

Media polarisation together with biased coverage by the majority of media outlets, including the public broadcaster, limited voters' access to impartial information. The only televised debate between the two candidates ahead of the second round was characterised by an absence of any effective moderation, allowing it to be used as a platform for mutual accusations rather than offering a meaningful comparison of political programmes.

At the same time, concerns continued about the lack of independence of the supreme court chamber established in 2018 that is responsible for validating election results. This controversy has lowered public trust in the judiciary.

The international election observation to the Polish presidential election totalled 42 observers from 24 countries, consisting of 34 ODIHR-deployed experts and long-term observers, and 8 parliamentarians and staff from PACE.