The crash has created a potentially dangerous vacuum in the Polish political landscape. President Kaczyński was accompanied by most of the leadership and key ideologues of the opposition PiS party. On the aeroplane were also the presidential candidates of the SLD left wing party and the PSL peasant party. The date of the forthcoming presidential elections was to be announced soon and a mood of pre-election rivalry had dominated recent political debates. The governor of the national bank and the head of the Institute of National Memory, where the secret service files have been deposited, both closely connected with Kaczyński, died with him in the crash. The presidential elections have now to take place by 20 June but only the candidate of the ruling PO party Bronisław Komorowski is there to stand. PiS is paralysed by the tragedy, but so are the SLD and the peasant parties. How will the ruling party behave? Will the electorate trust them to guide the nation through the period when PO politicians are likely to take over most decision making roles? At stake is not merely the hitherto healthy democratic system in Poland but the newly forged Polish-Russian reconciliation. Once the period of official mourning comes to an end there will be a need to ensure that no party exploits anti-Russian sentiments to steal a march on the ruling party. So far Russian politicians and the media have been helpful in creating that necessary mood of thoughtful contemplation. Polish leaders led by Prime Minister Tusk have likewise remained dignified and appreciative of all the aid given by Russian experts investigating the causes of the crash. Polish media have been determined not to allow speculation to take the debate in the direction where anti-Russian sentiments could be fanned. It is difficult not to conclude that both sides know that they are being observed by the European and US governments which would not support another round of squabbles.

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