
POLAND'S GOVERNMENT STOKES FEARS ABOUT REFUGEES

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Poland is defiantly refusing to accept refugees for resettlement, despite the threat of legal action from the European Union. Its government says it won't be blackmailed and is prepared to defend its position in court.

The Polish government is openly refusing to accept refugees, and according to deputy foreign minister Konrad Szymanski, is "prepared to defend its position in court." The statement comes as a reaction to a decision by Brussels to launch legal action against Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic for "not taking the necessary action" in dealing with refugees. Szymanski has accused the EU Commission of refusing to compromise on the issue, saying its course will only reinforce divisions in the EU.

But Poland's problems with European refugee policy go much deeper, though they surface each time there's an Islamist terrorist attack on European soil. Whether Manchester, London, or Paris, Polish state television TVP covers each attack in the same way.

Media manipulation

At first, a correspondent reports in a neutral fashion about the victims, the destruction, and the search for the perpetrators. But what always follows is a background report about the wave of refugees in Europe, the brave Hungarians who are defending their borders against the flood, and how German Chancellor Angela Merkel is to blame for having told refugees they were welcome. Lastly, the finger points at the European Commission for threatening Warsaw with legal action if it persists in its refusal to take in refugees - and the potential terrorists hiding amongst them.

Two years ago, the previous liberal government committed to taking in 7,000 refugees from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea, shortly before Poles ushered the current conservative government into power. With the exception of Portugal, almost all EU member states are behind schedule on the resettlement of refugees. Only about a fifth of the 160,000 migrants stranded in Greece and Italy have been resettled. But in addition to Hungary, Poland is the only country to have so far refused to accept any refugees. EU Commissioner for the Interior Dimitris Avramopoulos gave Warsaw and Budapest until the end of June, and said further refusal to cooperate would result in a lawsuit at the European Court in Luxembourg. Both countries are now facing significant fines.

Oil on the fire

But that is not having a deterrent effect on Poland. And the government of Law and Justice party (PiS) leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski has the support of the people; the seeds of its right-wing populist

campaign are now starting to take root. In election year 2015, the PiS warned voters against the wave of refugees, saying it would lead to increased "Islamization" in Europe. In the wake of recent terrorist attacks, the Poles' willingness to accept refugees dropped from 75 percent to 25 percent. Even if Poland has to give up financial support from the EU, two-thirds of the people would still be against letting refugees into the country despite the fact that the Catholic Bishops Conference called as recently as May for the creation of humanitarian corridors for war refugees, including to Poland.

But instead of taking such calls seriously, the PiS government, which likes to present itself as being particularly Christian, chooses to pour oil on the fire. A few days ago, Prime Minister Beata Szydlo spoke about the politically correct elites in Brussels, and said refugees were to blame for the Islamist terror attacks taking place in Europe. "We will not participate in this madness of the European elites!" she said. Rather, her government would ensure that "Polish children can safely go to clubs, to school and to the playground" without having to fear attacks such as the one in Manchester.

'Social disaster'

Now, Warsaw has said it would defend in court what it sees as its right not to accept any refugees at all. Taking in refugees from camps in Italy and Greece would end in "social disaster" according to PiS leader Kaczynski. "In addition to an increase in terrorism in Poland, there are many other dangers," he told a Polish newspaper.

Duda said Poland was an 'open' country during Steinmeier's visit to Warsaw

Polish President Andrzej Duda (PiS) signaled possible movement on the issue when German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier visited the country at the end of May. "Poland is open; anyone who voluntarily wants to come here is welcome," Duda said. "But what we will not allow is the forced resettlement of refugees in Poland," he added, saying that this would be a violation of their human rights.

However, not all Poles are against refugees. There are several Polish activist groups working on refugee initiatives. In the western city of Poznan, several schools have been collecting money to help refugees from Aleppo. And the city of Gdansk's liberal government has presented the "Gdansk Manifesto," a European initiative aimed at a grassroots approach to refugee resettlement, with the help of a special EU fund. Gdansk is also the first city in Poland to have come up with an integration concept for refugees. Yet across the country, such initiatives remain the exception.

Kaynak/Source: