
EU URGES POLAND TO RESPECT JUDICIAL REFORMS DEADLINE OR FACE ARTICLE 7 SANCTIONS

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Tuesday is the last day Poland has to respond to Commission demands that it restore the rule of law or face proceedings under Article 7. But according to Polish reports, it has no intention of changing its laws.

The European Commission on Tuesday urged Poland to respond to its demands of restoring law and order before a midnight deadline.

Poland faces punishment under never-before-used Article 7 of the European Union for placing courts under political control.

A white paper published by Poland that defended its reforms was rejected as an insufficient response to EU demands during a Tuesday debate between EU ministers and the European Commission's deputy head, Frans Timmermans.

Warsaw released a statement saying it rejected criticism and that it refuses to retract the laws, but said it was ready to discuss the results of its new laws, Polish news agency PAP reported.

'We have a problem'

"The Polish have until the end of today to come up with their response. I do expect them to do that," Timmermans told a Brussels news conference after the meeting. "If this idea that you have the right to reform the judiciary ... is understood as the right to put it under political control, then we have a problem."

"Talking for talking's sake is not enough and I hope that today ... will give a clear signal that EU members support the European Commission in this essential matter," Germany's EU minister Michael Roth said.

Polish European Affairs Minister Konrad Szymanski said he hoped member states would assess Warsaw's white paper in an "objective, unbiased, individual way," adding that Poland did not want a "passive duplication of someone else's opinion" among EU members.

Judges under pressure in Poland

Final hours: Tuesday is the last day Poland has to respond to Commission demands that it restore the rule of law or face proceedings under Article 7.

Never used before: Article 7, which has never previously been activated since it was established in the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam, allows the EU to punish members which seriously breach the EU's founding values. The multi-step process requires unanimous approval of the 27 member states other than Poland to pursue sanctions. However, member state Hungary has vowed to veto the move to strip Poland of its EU voting rights, which would stall the process.

Growing isolation: If the threat of Article 7 fails to reign in Poland's reforms, it could additionally face the loss of billions of euros of funding in the bloc's next long-term budget in 2021. Poland is currently the biggest beneficiary of EU handouts for infrastructure and other projects.

Controlling the courts: A series of laws introduced by Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) has granted the government significant control of the judiciary, including the power to hire and fire judges.

Next meeting: The Commission will meet again next month to assess whether "steps forward have been made or not."

Kaynak/Source: