
FORTRESS EUROPE LIVES ON IN POLAND

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This article is part of our special report Migration and security in Europe: Is immigration a threat or an asset?

Since 2015, Poland has strongly opposed receiving refugees from Italy and Greece. Until now, not a single person has been accepted under the quota system set by the European Commission. And the majority of Poles actually side with their government on the issue, EURACTIV Poland reports.

Surveys leave no doubt: Poles do not want to receive refugees.

According to a survey conducted by the Polish Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) published last December, 63% of respondents do not want people who fled war in their countries to enter Poland. Just 33% are in favour of receiving refugees.

Only two years earlier, in mid-2015, the situation was different. 21% of respondents opposed receiving refugees while 72% were in favour.

What has changed in the meantime is what we understand by the term refugee. Because of the wars in the Middle East and the Arab Spring, for many Poles, the words asylum or refugee came to be associated exclusively with people from Muslim countries.

The respondents cite cultural and religious differences as well as fears of radical Islam. However, while as many as 75% of Poles would oppose receiving people from the Middle East or Africa, only 32% would not want to accept refugees from Eastern Ukraine.

Rationality or management of fear?

These fears are understood by Dr Piotr Sebastian Ślusarczyk, a political scientist and president of the Foundation of the Institute of European Affairs in Warsaw. He is one of the authors who criticised migration from Africa and the Middle East to Europe on the website Euroislam.pl.

When comparing the Polish research with similar research results in many other European countries – for example in France, Germany, Italy or Spain – it turns out that citizens of these countries think similarly. The differences are small. Therefore, Poles do not stand out particularly in this matter, says Ślusarczyk.

He said people in Western Europe are often reluctant to admit views that are condemned by the

elite and media.

But Maria Złonkiewicz from the Polish Hospitality Foundation argues that the reason is entirely different – politicians. Their statements had a key impact on the opinions of Poles, she said.

The foundation runs two initiatives aimed at changing the tone of the refugee debate in Poland: The project With bread and salt (CHLEBEM I SOLA) helps refugees adapt to life in Poland, while the website Uchodźcy.info collects information on asylum seekers and tries to convince Poles to engage with them.

The websites authors have put together thousands of statements by Polish politicians about refugees and migration since 2015 and compared them with the results of regular sociological research.

The dependence was extremely visible. As soon as politicians, especially from the current ruling party, spoke strongly and negatively about refugees and migrants, support for their admission dropped – much more than, for example, after the terrorist attacks in Western Europe, explained Złonkiewicz.

She said the change became visible during the presidential and parliamentary campaigns in Poland in 2015.

Migration issues have become one of the most important topics of those campaigns. We therefore have to deal with the so-called fear management, she explained.

She recalled a speech by the Law and Justice (PiS) chairman Jarosław Kaczyński, who told an electoral rally in October 2015 that refugees could bring dangerous diseases, parasites or protozoa to Europe.

Meanwhile, in April 2017, in a special epidemiological centre in Biała Podlaska, where people seeking asylum in Poland are examined, there was no single case of a serious infectious or parasitic disease.

Where to look for solutions?

Both Złonkiewicz and Ślusarczyk agree that the EU must introduce new system-related solutions about migration and asylum policies.

According to Ślusarczyk, today's EU asylum system is not able to effectively distinguish economic migrants from refugees, which can lead to bizarre situations.

If you look at it from the point of view of the Geneva Convention, people who came to the EU, for example from Turkey, do not have to be recognised as refugees. They have already been in a country recognised as safe by the international community. We therefore have a legal vacuum here. Old solutions do not work anymore, and there are no new ones, he said.

He added the influx of people to Europe might not end with the end of the war in the Middle East:

Africa is also a problem. According to current UN forecasts, in 2015-2030 the population of Africa will increase by 450-570 million people. In total, there will be more than one and a half billion

people in Africa in 2030, four times more than in the EU. And if only 10% of Africans would want to come to Europe, it adds up to 3 million immigrants annually. The 2015 scenario may be repeated each year in that case.

He recommended drawing on Australian experiences, which means reaching agreements with the governments of African countries and supporting policies to combat overpopulation.

We must also support the economies of these countries so that the situation there improves. If Europe does not share its wealth with Africa, Africa will share its poverty with Europe. Three things should be done: introducing a smart policy aimed at combating the causes and effects of overpopulation, tightening borders also through the fight against, as well as economically help those countries that want to cooperate with Europe on fair terms, Ślusarczyk explained.

Złonkiewicz, however, argued that this approach is only part of the solution.

People will still be moving to other places in search of a better life. Some flee from war, others from poverty or climate change. This is the cost of a globalised world. You cannot close your eyes to this issue.

Locking ourselves up will not work. We are not North Korea after all. That is why we also need activities that will help integrate people who came to Europe. And integration is never a one-sided process. Everybody has to engage.

She admitted that integration was not easy, but it was not going to go away either.

No walls and fences will stop migration to Europe. Let us rather consider how this progressive mixing of cultures can be used, Złonkiewicz said.

Poland sticking to its 'zero-refugee' policy

While migrant relocations reached record levels this year (peaking in June with over 3,000) Poland and Hungary remained steadfast in their refusal to participate in EU-mandated resettlement efforts. EURACTIV Poland reports.

What should the EU do?

The current Polish government refused to take part in the programme for relocating refugees from Italy and Greece created by the European Commission. Although many EU member states have not yet met the quotas, Poland and Hungary are the only ones that have not accepted a single person.

Kosma Złotowski, MEP of Law and Justice, which belongs to the parliamentary group of the European Conservatives and Reformists, says this is the right decision.

Neither Poland nor the European Union are places where everyone can come just because they want to. Especially because we have the experience from Western Europe. There, parallel communities are formed, living according to the laws and customs imported from their countries. This is a very dangerous phenomenon □ by no means enriching culturally or in any other way,

Złotowski said.

But to Róża Thun, an MEP of the Civic Platform (EPP), countries like Poland and Hungary are wrong not to join in the EU's efforts to help refugees.

PiS politicians prefer to scare Poles, prefer to present false statistical data or use manipulations on public television. For example, it is wrong to say that refugees are responsible for terrorist attacks. The vast majority behind these attacks are people who were born in the EU. They are often even the grandchildren of migrants from the Middle East or North Africa. It is wrong to say that the only solution is lockdown.

What is important, however, is the development of a common European migration and asylum policy that will treat these phenomena in a multi-aspect manner. The world is changing. And it is only up to us whether we face these changes together as 500 million EU citizens, or whether everyone will solve these problems alone, said Thun.

Polish PM rejects EU 'blackmail' on migrant quotas

Poland's rightwing premier said Sunday (3 September) that her country would not be blackmailed by its largest EU partners into accepting thousands of asylum seekers under a quota system for spreading them throughout the bloc.

For Bogusław Liberadzki, MEP of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and vice-President of the European Parliament on behalf of S&D, the issue of migration is in fact the issue of what Europe will look like around the year 2050.

On the one hand, in many countries of the EU, especially in the West, there is a shortage of hands to work. On the other, people from non-European countries are much more demographically active than ageing Europe. Simply put - they have more children.

That is why the EU must ask questions not only about finding solutions to current challenges but also about the model of society and the demographic structure in 20-30 years. We must think about integration measures because mistakes committed 30-40 years ago mean that today we are dealing with the radicalisation of people who come from immigrant families but were born in the EU.

Despite all the fuss, very few refugees actually come to Poland and most of those who arrive here want to go on to the countries in Western Europe, so migration in Poland is a marginal issue.

At the same time, there are more than 2.5 million Polish citizens permanently residing in the other EU member states, according to the Central Statistical Offices data presented in February.

Kaynak/Source: