



Weekly Briefing

**Poland external relations briefing:
Two main developments in latest Polish external relations
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Two main developments in latest Polish external relations

Summary

The increased number and activity of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine has raised concerns in Poland, prompting a strong reaction from its authorities. In its policy, Poland supports the sovereignty and inviolability of Ukraine's borders. In response to the Russian actions, Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Zbigniew Rau paid a special visit to Kiev and met with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytr Kuleba. The head of Polish diplomacy also spoke with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on the issue. In response to the events on the Ukrainian-Russian border, Polish President Andrzej Duda convened a special briefing with the participation of the Ministry of Defense and commanders of the Polish armed forces.

Belarusian authorities have arrested five leaders of the Union of Poles in Belarus (ZPB), including its head Angelika Borys, charging them with "organization of illegal events," "inciting national hatred" and "rehabilitation of Nazism". The actions of the Belarusian authorities were strongly criticized by the Polish authorities and the Polish President Andrzej Duda appealed to international organizations and the U.S. President to react to the actions of the Belarusian authorities against the Polish minority. ZPB is the largest organization of the Polish minority in Belarus. About 300 thousand Poles live in this country. These are not the first hostile actions of the Belarusian authorities against the Polish minority. The authorities of this country accuse the Polish association and Poland of supporting the Belarusian opposition forces against the rule of Alexander Lukashenko.

Poland in the face of the situation on the Ukrainian-Russian border

The head of Polish diplomacy Zbigniew Rau spoke after his visit to Kiev about Poland's support for Ukraine.

- The purpose of my visit was to confirm our policy that Ukraine is not alone in defending its sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, and Ukraine has the right to defend itself. An independent and secure Ukraine is an inalienable part of Europe based on the foundation of the principles of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the 30th anniversary of which we recently celebrated - said the head of Polish diplomacy Zbigniew Rau.

Conversations with the Americans

At the initiative of the American side, the Polish foreign minister spoke by telephone, among other things, about the events on the Ukrainian border with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. As reported by the Spokesperson's Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister Zbigniew Rau and Secretary of State Antony Blinken "assessed as highly disturbing and threatening to international security the unprecedented, in terms of scope since 2014, increase in Russian military presence and activity on the eastern border of Ukraine and on the territory of the Crimean Peninsula occupied by the Russian Federation." They noted that the situation is aggravated by the "lack of constructive response from the Russian Federation to diplomatic initiatives aimed at deescalating tensions and reducing risks." The interlocutors "agreed on the need to continue supporting Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression." They considered it necessary to "take measures-including sanctions" -that would persuade Russia "to ease tensions in relations with Ukraine and to fully engage in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.". On April 15, Poland, in solidarity with the American decision on sanctions against Russia, recognized three Russian diplomats in Poland as "unwanted persons". In response, Russia expelled five Polish diplomats.

The President Duda convenes briefing of military commanders

The Polish President Andrzej Duda also convened a briefing with the Ministry of Defense, military commanders and service chiefs to discuss Russian activity near the border with Ukraine. Paweł Soloch, The Head of the Polish National Security Bureau (BBN), explained that the meeting served to prepare a common position with NATO allies and partners in the European Union. He stressed that the situation in Ukraine is serious and requires cooperation primarily of NATO allies, but also of Polish partners in the region. The Head of the National Security Bureau expressed his opposition to the increase of tensions near the Ukrainian-Russian border and stated that there is no consent for Moscow's new aggression against Poland's eastern neighbor.

- We are dealing with an unknown for years concentration of Russian forces, the situation in Ukraine is serious, we do not agree with the new aggression against this country - he stressed. He also announced that President Andrzej Duda would seek a common position of the transatlantic community on Ukraine and, if necessary, support decisive steps to prevent Russia from escalating the crisis. The foreign affairs committee of the Polish Senate also adopted a

resolution in which it appealed to NATO to undertake negotiations between the parties to the conflict.

In brief, the reaction of the Polish government to Russian actions on the border with Ukraine has been firm and decisive. Poland attaches particular importance to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, its eastern neighbor. Poland considers the threat to the security and territorial integrity of Ukraine posed by Russia to be a threat to Poland's security as well.

Arresting the leaders of the Polish minority in Belarus

President Andrzej Duda assured of help for Poles living in Belarus after the arrest of five leaders of the Union of Poles in Belarus by the authorities of this country. - We will not leave our compatriots in Belarus alone, we will intervene in their case - he assured. The President addressed the repressions against the Polish minority in Belarus to three international organizations - the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the United Nations, as well as in a special letter to US President Joe Biden.

Reaction of the European Commission, appeal to the USA

- The regime in Minsk attacks the Polish minority for political reasons, as members of the Belarusian society, connected with the transatlantic democratic institutions - stressed President Andrzej Duda in his letter to U.S. President Joe Biden. In the letter, the Polish President called for urgent action to address human rights violations in Belarus. Duda pointed to the persecution of civil society, including the Polish minority. He also called for action at the United Nations Security Council under the current U.S. presidency of that body. The European Commission has appealed for the immediate release of Angelika Borys, President of the Union of Poles in Belarus, and Andrzej Poczobut, an activist with the Union of Poles in Belarus. As it stressed, the Polish minority is the latest target of the Belarusian authorities' policy.

Accusations against Polish minority

In late March, the Belarusian authorities detained four activists of the Union of Poles in Belarus (ZPB) in Grodno, including a member of the ZPB board Andrzej Poczobut and the head of the Union Andżelika Borys. They were initially sentenced to 15 days in jail for

"organizing an illegal event", which the Belarusian authorities recognized as a traditional fair "Kaziuki in Grodno. The activists were included in the criminal proceedings, reported by the General Prosecutor's Office of Belarus. It concerns "incitement to hatred on a nationalistic ground" and "rehabilitation of Nazism". They face a sentence of 5 to 12 years imprisonment.

The Union of Poles in Belarus is the largest organization of the Polish minority in this country. In 2005, the authorities in Minsk deprived it of registration. The statutory goals of the Union include nurturing Polishness, propagating Polish culture, teaching the Polish language and caring for memorial sites. The Belarusian authorities accuse the Union of supporting opposition actions against the Belarusian authorities.

Expulsion of diplomats

In mid-March, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry announced that the country is to leave the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Grodno Jaroslaw Ksiazek and the Head of the consular department Pawel Niedzwiedzki. The Belarusian foreign ministry explained its decision with "an asymmetrical and destructive Polish response to the legitimate and justified decision against the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Brest". The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in response to the actions of the Belarusian MFA decided to expel two Belarusian diplomats from Poland.

On March 25th, the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki took part in a videoconference of the leaders of the European Union countries. One of the topics he discussed was the situation in Belarus - expulsion of Polish diplomats and arrests of activists of the Polish minority in Belarus. The Head of the Polish Government made a statement on the detention of the President of the Union of Poles in Belarus Andżelika Borys. - Poland wants to build good relations with Belarus in peace and friendship, but we cannot agree to harassment of our compatriots and treating them as hostages. Every Pole, including those living in Belarus, can count on our help - emphasized the Polish Prime Minister.

In conclusion, longstanding and currently intensified hostile actions of the Belarusian authorities against the Union of Poles in Belarus are part of the policy of President Alexander Lukashenko aimed at limiting the opposition activity in the country. The Union of Poles is presented by the Belarusian authorities as an organization that supports the opposition forces in Belarus and is supported by the Polish authorities. The actions directed against the Polish

minority intensified after the recent presidential elections in Belarus, which were accompanied by numerous demonstrations of the Belarusian opposition circles.