



Weekly Briefing

Poland social briefing:
Dispute over the influx of immigrants to Poland
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Dispute over the influx of immigrants to Poland

Summary

A heated debate has heated up in Poland in response to new European Union proposals for a refugee relocation scheme. Poland's ruling camp opposes EU plans to introduce solidarity mechanisms for all countries to take in illegal migrants. The Polish government says the mechanism introduces compulsion to take in illegal immigrants or pay for not taking them in. Brussels reassures, the EU mechanism is not coercive and will include special exemptions for certain countries. A special resolution opposing the EU relocation mechanism was adopted by the Polish parliament. A referendum is to be held in Poland in the autumn, in conjunction with parliamentary elections, in which Poles are expected to have their say on the EU proposal. The topic of migrants has become an important element of the election campaign ahead of the autumn elections.

Introduction

In mid-June, the Polish parliament adopted a resolution opposing the EU's relocation mechanism for illegal migrants and obliging the government to firmly oppose the European Union's plans. An overwhelming majority of MPs voted in favour of the resolution, drafted by the government camp. However, the majority of the opposition did not participate in the vote. According to the Polish MPs who voted in favour of the resolution, the current proposal to introduce a so-called migration pact harkens back to proposals made during the migration crisis in Europe in 2014 and 2015.

Polish parliament: no consent to a repeat of the migration crisis

"We do not agree that the Polish state should bear the social and financial costs of erroneous decisions of another European Union member state". - the resolution states.¹ "The 'open door' policy pushed by Germany within the European Union, in violation of the treaties, has proved to be a fatal mistake. Its negative consequences are now the decisions taken in the Council of the European Union. The previous bad decisions of 2014 and 2015 cannot be duplicated. This applies both to the EU policy directions set by Germany and to the decisions taken by politicians of the PO-PSL government (the current Polish opposition - KR) " -

indicated. The resolution stresses that "European solidarity cannot take the form of blackmail - submission or financial punishment". "Decisions on such an important issue cannot be taken outside the control of Member States or against them by circumventing the principle of unanimity," - it wrote. As added, "the Sejm of the Republic of Poland commits the Government of the Republic of Poland to firmly oppose such practices".

At the same time, the text of the resolution points out that as a result of Russia's launch of a full-scale war in Ukraine, some 7 million refugees have come to Poland in search of safety. "To date, approximately 1.5 million of them have remained in our country". - it stressed. "Under the circumstances, attempts to place an additional burden on our country to accept illegal migrants arriving in other Member States or to establish an obligation to pay financial penalties must arouse deep objection, as the adoption of the proposed solutions would constitute an unlawful interference in the treaty competences of Member States and could lead to an increase in the influx of illegal migrants into the European Union". - reads the resolution.

Referendum on EU proposals

The leader of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, Deputy Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński, has announced the organisation of a referendum on the relocation of migrants. It is to take place in the autumn, on the same date as the planned parliamentary elections, which is likely to be 15 October. - The European Union's decision undermines Polish sovereignty and the sovereignty of other European countries," assessed the Law and Justice leader. He recalled the unprecedented assistance of Poles to refugees from Ukraine after the Russian invasion of that country began. He pointed out that Poland received many times less money from the EU for this purpose than it would have to pay for not accepting the number of migrants imposed through the forced relocation mechanism. - 'This is a mockery of Poland, this is discrimination, extremely brazen,' Kaczynski told the Polish parliament.

The Polish opposition, but also the majority of public opinion, opposes the organisation of a referendum on this issue, seeing it as part of the ruling camp's election campaign. The Polish public, however, is mostly averse to the EU's forced relocation mechanism for illegal immigrants. The issue of immigrants and the discussion on it may therefore attract new voters for the ruling camp. The relocation process could affect around 2,000 illegal immigrants.

What is the EU relocation mechanism about?

8th of June 2023. The European Union has reached agreement on two important draft regulations: The Asylum Procedure Regulation and the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation. The first establishes a common procedure that Member States would apply to applicants for international protection. The second is intended to replace the existing Dublin Regulation, which determines which Member State is responsible for processing an asylum application. Countries such as Italy and Malta, where migrants arrive via the Mediterranean, wanted new solutions.ⁱⁱ

The 'compulsory solidarity' system says that while 'no Member State will ever be obliged to carry out relocations', 'a minimum annual number of relocations will be set from the Member States from which the majority of people enter the EU to Member States less exposed to such arrivals'. In simple terms, the proposed legislation gives member states a choice - they can either receive the asylum seeker or pay other states to receive him or her. The cost is €20,000 per person. It is this legislation that arouses the most emotion. EU officials point out that some countries, such as Poland, may be excluded from the compulsory relocation mechanism, but this must be agreed by Brussels.

The Polish government in Brussels against the relocation of migrants

In July, the Council of the European Union held a summit where the leaders of the 27 Member States failed to break the deadlock over the migration pact.ⁱⁱⁱ Poland wanted the conclusions to state that EU migration and asylum policy should be based on the sovereign right of member states to shape their migration policy and decide whom they accept on their territory. - We did not agree to take consensus or adopt the migration conclusions in this form, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki told a press conference. The head of the Polish government said that the proposed solutions regarding the amount of fines and the arbitrariness of increasing them if a country refuses to accept migrants are "extremely dangerous". - 'I hope that Europe will come to its senses soon,' he added.

- This is why we have put forward the 'Europe of secure borders' plan. This is an increased investment in strengthening the EU's external borders. It is also a reduction of social benefits for non-EU citizens and people without special status due to the war in Ukraine," Mateusz Morawiecki pointed out.

However, the Polish government is alone in Europe on the issue of the 'migration pact', the Polish position opposing the relocation mechanism being supported only by Hungary.

The Polish opposition attacks the government

The leader of Poland's largest opposition party, the Civic Platform (PO), Donald Tusk, addressed the government's actions and announcements on migration in an attempt to show the inconsistency of those in power who, in his view, are themselves supporting the influx of migrants into Poland. "The Law and Justice party has issued more residence permits than France and Germany combined," he - he said in a special recording^{iv} He pointed out that "for the past few days, the whole of Poland has been discussing the PiS government's mass immigration policy. And more shocking facts are coming to light every day," said the PO leader. - Take a look at this graph, for example. Here is the work permit issued in so-called Muslim countries under the PO government and look how it looks under the PiS government. This is 2022, over 135,000," he says. Did you know that PiS has issued more residence permits than France and Germany combined? That's what European statistics say, but the real bomb is yet to be prepared for us,' Tusk stresses. I have here in my hand a regulation prepared by them, according to which they want to process at least 400,000 visa applications next year, mainly in Asian and African countries, and if we give them the whole term of office, they will process well over a million of these applications. This will be Kaczyński's real million," the politician states.

Tusk also pointed out that Law and Justice's actions are taking place at a time when Poles are helping Ukrainian families with sacrifice. 'Kaczyński and the Law and Justice party have for many weeks been further intensifying this campaign of their dehumanisation of immigrants, their contempt for strangers, their dislike of others,' he says in the recording. This sick logic must be reversed. We need a policy in which every human being, regardless of their place of regulation, religion, colour or opinion, enjoys full respect, respect and full rights and, at the same time, we need an efficient state which is able to control its territory and its borders and which pursues a sensible, responsible, pragmatic migration policy," declares the PO leader. The PiS party wants to ask Poles about migration policy in a referendum? They seem to have really fallen on their heads. Today it is the Poles who want to ask the PiS government: what do you really mean," he added.

The ruling party counters this criticism of the opposition leader by pointing out that the figure of 130,000 relates to work permits for foreigners (which is not related to their actual stay), and that only 28,000 work visas, which are limited only to the possibility for immigrants to take

up employment, have been issued.^v They also point out that these people were vetted by Polish services, which will not be the case in the situation of the EU relocation mechanism. However, the government, after Tusk's recording, abandoned work on a Foreign Ministry regulation that was supposed to streamline bringing workers, mainly from Asia, to Poland.

Immigrants in Poland in numbers

According to data from the Polish Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) as at the end of 2022, less than 40 thousand citizens of EU countries were registered in the Polish social insurance system, but more than a million from non-EU countries, including 746 thousand people with Ukrainian citizenship. After Ukrainians, the largest number 108 thousand of Belarusians living and working legally in Poland, Georgians (27.4 thousand), Indians (16 thousand) and Moldovans (14.7 thousand).^{vi} The number of immigrants shows that Poland is still a relatively monocultural country. Poland has approximately 38 million inhabitants. However, the number of foreigners in Poland is significantly higher, as the above figures do not include persons not registered in the system. It is therefore difficult to determine accurately.

Poland is facing a demographic crisis and this is affecting the situation of the pension system. Experts point out that the country needs an influx of immigrants to fill the gap in the labor market. According to a study by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), the number of people of post - working age per 100 people of working age in Poland will rise to 43 over the next 10 years.^{vii} ZUS has carried out an analysis, which shows that in order to maintain the so-called 'old-age dependency ratio' at its current level (currently at 39 per cent), the number of working-age foreigners would have to increase by 200,000-400,000 each year over the next few years, and would have to reach 2.2 million people in 2030. However, ZUS analysts themselves consider such a scenario to be unrealistic. More realistic, according to the analysts, is halving the growth of the dependency ratio - which would require an increase in the number of working-age foreigners at a rate of 100-200 thousand per year. In 2032, the number of foreigners would then amount to almost 1.3 million people - 6.1 per cent of the working-age population. The reality of such a scenario is demonstrated by the trend observed by ZUS: In 2020, the number of foreigners in Poland registered for social insurance increased by 74,000, in 2021 by 150,000 and in 2022 already by 188,000.

Conclusion

The topic of immigrants in Poland is generating heated public debate. Poland opposes the EU mechanism for the forced relocation of illegal immigrants, which is also opposed by the Polish public. The topic has also triggered political disputes within the country. The Polish opposition accuses the government of using the topic of immigrants in its election campaign ahead of the autumn parliamentary elections.

i _____ The Radio RMF Portal https://www.rmf24.pl/polityka/news-sejm-przyjal-uchwale-ws-przyjmowania-migrantow,nld,6843149#crp_state=1

ii _____ The news portal Onet.pl <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/awantura-o-pakt-migracyjny-o-co-chodzi-dane-i-liczby-ktore-warto-znac/mrr5j9s>

iii _____ The weekly "Do Rzeczy" portal <https://dorzeczy.pl/unia-europejska/456426/pakt-migracyjny-ustalenia-na-radzie-europejskie.html>

iv _____ The informative portal Dziennik.pl Portal <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/8746568,nowy-spot-tuska-o-imigrantach-rzecznik-pis-wakacyjne-slonce-przygrza.html>

v _____ The informative portal Wprost.pl <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/11304184/burzliwa-dyskusja-w-sejmie-schetyna-zada-wyjasnien.html>

vi _____ The weekly "Polityka" portal <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/2219266,1,raport-polityki-stary-nowy-wrog-pis-imigranci-ilu-ich-jest-jak-zyja-gdzie-pracuja.read>

vii _____ The Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) Report https://www.zus.pl/documents/10182/2322024/Cudzoziemcy+w+polskim+systemie+ubezpiecze%C5%84+spo%C5%82ecznych_2022.pdf/b457fe14-91e8-c030-40bc-67c3eb92af17?t=1686552717173