

Poland placed under EU supervision amid escalating Polish-German tensions

Dorota Niemitz and Clara Weiss**15 January 2016**

On January 13, European Commission (EC) Vice President Frans Timmermans announced that the EC had initiated steps toward monitoring the “rule of law” in Poland. The move comes in the wake of a massive campaign against the Polish government by German politicians and media outlets and signals an extreme escalation of tensions within the European Union. Poland is the EU’s sixth largest economy and the biggest one in Eastern Europe. In July of this year, Warsaw will host the NATO summit.

The “rule of law framework” was adopted by the EC, the executive arm of the EU, only recently, in March 2014, to “address systemic threats to the rule of law in any of the EU’s 28 Member States.” The first stage of the process forces a dialogue between the EC and Polish officials to put pressure on the decision-making process relating to the country’s new policies. If Warsaw does not comply with “proposals” by Brussels, the EU can set a deadline for implementing the policies it has suggested. If the Polish government should then still not comply with the demands of the EU, the EC can theoretically, based on Article 7 of the EU treaty, deprive Poland of its voting rights and cut it off from a number of EU funds.

The mechanism can be blocked, however, by vetoes of other EU member states. To this aim, Law and Justice party (PiS) head Jarosław Kaczyński held a secret meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has also established an authoritarian right-wing regime in his country.

The EU justifies its unprecedented move on the basis of the blatant assault on democratic rights by the new PiS-government, which was brought to power in the October parliamentary elections. Within the first weeks of its rule, the government has taken control of the Constitutional Court and the country’s secret services. With a bill introduced at the end of the last year, it placed public radio and television under government control.

The constitutional coup by the PiS government is aimed at establishing an authoritarian dictatorship in order to prepare the grounds for a crackdown on the social rights of the working class and a major role of Poland in the US war drive against Russia.

The EC move to place Poland under EU supervision, however, has absolutely nothing to do with the defence of democracy. The EU itself has been the main mechanism for an all-out assault on democratic rights in Europe over the past years, implementing drastic measures in Greece, Italy, Spain and other countries in total disregard for basic democratic mechanisms and against the opposition of the vast majority of the population. Rather, it is a move aimed at pressuring a government that has moved into open opposition with Germany, the EU’s dominant power, over a number of geopolitical issues.

The EC’s decision was preceded by an aggressive campaign by German politicians and media against the new Polish government. It was also a German politician, Günther Oettinger from the ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU), now the acting EU commissar for media, who first publicly suggested implementing this EU mechanism against Poland in an interview with the leading German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

The German bourgeoisie is opposed to the increasingly close alliance between the PiS government and US imperialism. PiS is trying to build an alliance of Eastern European states that would form a counterweight to the German-dominated EU and play a major role in a regime-change in Moscow orchestrated by US imperialism or an all-out war against Russia.

The PiS government reacted to the campaign in Germany with an aggressive anti-German press campaign in Poland itself, while leading politicians tried, at the same time, to downplay the scale of the tensions with Berlin.

On Monday, German Ambassador Rolf Nikel was

summoned by Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski to a 40-minute one-on-one discussion on the “anti-Polish comments of German politicians”. Waszczykowski afterward tried to downplay this step, which had previously only been taken with the Russian ambassador. He argued that “miscommunication” was at the roots of the current Polish-German tensions. Waszczykowski also invited his German counterpart, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, to come to Warsaw. Nikel too tried to deescalate tensions, saying he and Waszczykowski had a good discussion and that German-Polish relations were “a treasure” that had to be guarded.

Meanwhile, an anti-German campaign to support the new government has developed in the Polish media. In order to prop up their own reactionary agenda, the Polish nationalists and far-right systematically make use of the crimes of German imperialism in Poland during World War II and the disgust that the return of German militarism justifiably provokes in the general population.

Poland’s justice minister, Zbigniew Ziobro, compared the proposed EU supervision to the Nazi occupation of Poland during the Second World War. Referring to a comment by Martin Schulz, a politician of the German SPD and head of the European Parliament, in which he described what had taken place in Poland as a “cold coup d'état”, the pro-PiS, far-right *Gazeta Warszawska* wrote: “History makes a disturbing full circle. Seventy-six years after the attack on Poland ... [Schulz] simply continues the anti-Polish rhetoric of Hitler.”

A cover of the pro-PiS weekly *Wprost* shows Chancellor Angela Merkel and four other German politicians wearing Nazi uniforms next to the headline “They want to control Poland again”. The latest cover of the right-wing weekly *wSieci*, titled “Conspiracy against Poland”, features a photomontage of Merkel and Schulz as the Russian empress Catherine the Great and King of Prussia Frederick II in reference to 1773, depicting the first partition of Poland between Prussia, the Habsburg-Austrian Empire and Tsarist Russia.

Krystyna Paw?owicz, a PiS parliamentary delegate, called for boycotting German banks and products. PiS head Kaczy?ski declared during the 69th commemoration of the Smole?sk plane crash that killed his twin brother Lech: “No pressure, no hollering or words, especially from German lips, will turn us from our path.”

However, the Polish bourgeoisie itself is deeply divided over the country’s foreign policy. These divisions were revealed sharply in a parliamentary session on January 13 at which Prime Minister Beata Szyd?o failed to achieve a

consensus with the parliamentary opposition on foreign policy.

In an open attack on the government’s foreign policy orientation, the deputy head of the Civic Platform (PO) parliamentary club, Rafa? Trzaskowski, stated: “We do not want to lose Poland’s position that we have built for the past eight years. The national interest is not represented by losing the influence in the EU and in the world or creating some pipe dreams of the next Intermarium, but [by] cooperation on equal terms with our partners.”

PO, the former ruling party, still favours an orientation towards Germany and the EU. Under the PO government, Polish-German relations were praised as the best history had ever seen. In 2014, Radek Sikorski, then foreign minister, had called for the salvation of Europe from crisis under a strong German leadership.

Newspapers and journals supporting the political line of PO have expressed support for Merkel’s policies. The leading liberal daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* wrote that in the context of the refugee crisis and the events in Cologne, the weakening position of Merkel, who has come under increasing attack by ruling circles in Germany, were bad news both for both Europe and Poland. The PO-led opposition previously appealed to the EU in the protests staged in recent weeks in Warsaw and other cities by layers of the urban middle class. The latest edition of *Newsweek Poland*, with the cover title “The Rape of Poland”, describes the opposition’s appeal for EU intervention in Poland as an act of patriotism.



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