Warsaw and Brussels intensify attacks on refugees at Polish-Belarusian border

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9 November 2021

The Polish government, with the support of the European Union and NATO, is waging a veritable war against refugees. After several hundred refugees near the Polish border town of Kuznica tried to break through the frontier and enter Polish territory, 2,000 additional Polish soldiers were sent to the border and the crossing was sealed off. Moreover, the Polish Territorial Defense Force was put on alert and NATO was called for consultation.

According to the Polish research service Okopress and the Belarusian Twitter channel Nexta, the refugees, mostly from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, in desperation and to send a signal, set out together on foot from the Belarusian capital Minsk to the border with Poland. They have been met by a massive display of force from Poland and the EU.

For weeks, the borders to Poland and Lithuania have been closed to refugees, and those who are apprehended while crossing are forcibly shipped back to Belarus by border guards in illegal pushback operations. Thus, refugees attempted to use the official border crossing at Kuznica-Bruzgi. However, just shy of the border, they were allegedly run off the road by Belarusian border guards and driven into the woods.

As videos of the refugee caravan, which includes many women and children, spread on Twitter and Telegram, the government's crisis team met in Warsaw: President Andrzej Duda, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Poland's de facto head of government and deputy prime minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, as well as the ministers of interior and defense and intelligence chiefs.

Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszak declared martially that his ministry, together with the Interior Ministry, which is responsible for police and border protection, was "ready to defend the Polish border." The border fortifications near the small town of Kuznica were secured by hundreds of military police, border guards and soldiers. The refugees, who were apparently chanting "Germany, Germany" and trying to create gaps in the barbed wire border with simple cutters and tree trunks, were forced away from the border with tear gas and pepper spray.

As if reporting from a war zone, a spokesman for the Polish Border Guard said, "We withstood the first wave and are waiting to see what happens in a while when night falls. We are well prepared." In the meantime, the refugees, whose numbers were said to have risen to about 1,000 by evening, have set up a tent camp on the Belarusian side of the border and lit campfires.

The Polish government will prevent refugees from entering Poland at all costs. That is why the troop deployment at the border has now risen to 12,000 soldiers to hunt down refugees in addition to thousands of border guards and military police. The government's crisis management team has announced that it will put the Territorial Defense Force on alert. The 29,000-strong force is a sort of volunteer army and reports directly to the defense minister. It was formed in 2016 for the purpose of suppressing rebellion, among other things, and recruits heavily from nationalist and far-right circles.

The mobilization of additional troop units is evidently directed not only against the refugees, but also against the regime of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus. The rhetoric of Warsaw and the EU toward the Belarusian government and its closest ally, Moscow, is becoming increasingly hostile.

Poland's intelligence coordinator Stanislaw Zaryn on Twitter announced another hostile act against Poland, claiming, "According to the latest information, this huge group of migrants is under the control of armed Belarusian units that decide where it can and cannot go." He further claimed, "More and more frequently, Belarusians bring groups of migrants to the Polish border, up to 250 people, to escort them en masse to the Polish side. They control and organize these groups and also

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help cut through the border fortifications."

Zaryn could not provide any proof for his claims.

Piotr Wawrzyk, secretary of state at Poland's Foreign Ministry, told state radio, "Belarus wants to provoke an incident of shooting and killing." Meanwhile, Poland's Morawiecki accused Lukashenko of deliberately creating the refugee crisis together with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He said, "We are dealing with a mass organized, well-directed action by Minsk and Moscow."

The German government sounded the same horn. A Foreign Office spokesman announced that there were "indications that the Minsk regime is repeatedly sending people to the border, in some cases by force, despite the adverse conditions and wintry temperatures." The German government is therefore working on a joint EU response "to this perfidious and inhumane behavior of Mr. Lukashenko."

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Monday evening that Belarus must stop the "cynical instrumentalization of migrants" and called on "member states to approve the extended sanctions regime against the Belarusian authorities responsible for this hybrid attack."

NATO, which has been consulted by the Polish government, openly threatened Belarus with acts of war. According to information obtained by *Die Welt*, a representative of the military alliance said in Brussels on Monday that NATO views "the recent escalation on the border between Poland and Belarus" with concern. He warned Belarus against "instrumentalizing people against the military alliance" and threatened that NATO "stands ready to support allies and provide security."

All the lies and threats cannot hide the fact that Warsaw and Brussels—accompanied by a deafening smear campaign in the media—are implementing the program of the far right at Europe's external borders. They are willing to repel refugees by any means available, including force of arms if necessary.

Since the Polish government declared a state of emergency on the border with Belarus, thousands of refugees have remained unprovided for in the forests and swamps. Journalists and aid organizations are strictly forbidden from entering a three-kilometer-wide strip along the border. With temperatures hovering around freezing, the refugees, many of whom have no blankets, tents or even shoes, are trapped in no-man's land, defenseless against the cold. At least 10 refugees have died in the border region in recent weeks.

Every day, the massive police and army force intercepts more than 700 refugees who have managed to cross the border and herds them back into Belarus in violation of international law. On October 26, a Polish law legalizing these illegal and internationally prohibited pushbacks came into force. Since then, any border guard commander may immediately deport refugees who have entered Poland without permission and prohibit their re-entry for up to three years.

Although this means the de facto abolition of the right of asylum in Poland, and despite the regulation massively violating EU law, the Polish actions enjoy the support of Brussels. The EU is even urging Poland to accept more European help in warding off refugees. For example, units of the EU border agency Frontex are to be dispatched to Poland as soon as requested by the government in Warsaw.

Germany is playing a particularly aggressive role in enforcing the fascistic "Fortress Europe" policy. On Tuesday morning, German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Democratic Union) explicitly backed the illegal pushbacks and the construction of a massive border wall. In an interview with the *Bild* newspaper, he said that the Polish government has "reacted correctly so far." "I say as well that we need structural security at the borders. That's where we need to publicly support the Poles!"

The brutal, inhumane and thoroughly illegal action against defenseless refugees is a warning. It shows the methods the ruling class will resort to in their efforts to suppress the growing opposition to social inequality and the pervasive policies in the pandemic that have already claimed more than 1.4 million lives in Europe alone. Workers across the continent must defend the refugees. This is not only a humanitarian necessity, but a fundamental part of the struggle against dictatorship, fascism and war.

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