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Poland offers support for anti-LGBTQ towns refused EU funding

Polish minister says Brussels' actions were 'illegal and unauthorized.'

By Zosia Wanat

Politico (18.08.2020) – <https://politi.co/3b1JauL> – Polish towns that were refused EU money because of their anti-LGBTQ views can count on financial support from the government in Warsaw, Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro said Tuesday.

Ziobro, leader of the ultra-conservative United Poland – the junior coalition party in the government headed by Law and Justice (PiS) – and author of sweeping and controversial changes to the judiciary, said he would grant the southern town of Tuchów, which last year signed an anti-LGBTQ charter, 250,000 złoty (€57,000) – three times as much as the town was supposed to get from the European Commission under a citizens' program for twin municipalities.

In July, Equality Commissioner Helena Dalli rejected grants for six Polish towns, including Tuchów, linking the decision to anti-gay declarations. Since 2019, dozens of Polish towns, counties and regions have signed such declarations and charters.

Ziobro on Tuesday called Dalli's decision "persecution" and "ideological revenge," claiming that local authorities such as Tuchów's don't discriminate against anyone but protect traditional family values.

"Ms. Dalli's actions were illegal and unauthorized," he said. "We can't leave such municipalities on their own. The Polish state, in a legitimate reaction condemning the European Commission's action, will stand together with the local authorities and the citizens."

Ziobro said he'd talk to the country's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, about setting up a special "financial mechanism" to help those towns that have been "harassed" by the Commission. He also admitted that the ministry couldn't

identify the other five towns that hadn't received the EU money.

Earlier this month, the Polsat television station reported that some towns that applied to be part of the twinning program and were rejected did not sign anti-LGBTQ declarations. Ziobro on Tuesday said that Dalli might have "punished some of the towns in advance."

The Commission did not disclose the names of the six towns that didn't receive the money. It did say that some of the rejected applications came from towns elsewhere in Europe that had partnerships with Polish regions that had signed anti-LGBTQ declarations.

The row over LGBTQ rights is another chapter of Warsaw's fight with Brussels. Discussions on the EU's long-term budget and coronavirus recovery fund contained a proposal to link funding to the rule of law, which proved one of the most contentious in the negotiations as Hungary and Poland opposed a strong link. The final agreement watered down earlier language on the topic.

On Monday, a group of famous names – including film director Pedro Almodóvar, writer Margaret Atwood and philosopher Slavoj Žižek – sent a letter to the European Commission, calling on Brussels "to take immediate steps to defend core European values – equality, non-discrimination, respect for minorities – which are being blatantly violated in Poland."

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