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## **Poland's anti-LGBT+ tirade similar to pre-war 'dehumanising' of Jews, MEP says**

***Gay Polish former presidential candidate sees parallels between treatment of LGBT+ people today and Jewish community before war.***

By Hugo Greenhalgh

Thomson Reuters Foundation (14.09.2020) - <https://tmsnrt.rs/32AN3nY> - A prominent gay politician in Poland has compared the government's repeated attacks on the LGBT+ community to the way Jewish people were "dehumanised" in the run-up to World War Two.

LGBT+ rights are increasingly contested in Poland, where President Andrzej Duda was re-elected in July after an acrimonious campaign in which he proposed a constitutional ban on same-sex adoption and LGBT+ education in schools.

"The president of the republic dehumanises LGBTI people and calls them 'not humans'," said Robert Biedron, a former Polish presidential candidate who now sits in the European Parliament.

"I remember from the schoolbooks that Jewish people (before World War Two) were dehumanised, they were called 'not humans', and to me these resemble those times," Biedron told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a telephone interview.

Biedron, 44, was speaking in advance of a European Parliament meeting due on Monday to debate possible action against Poland in protest at the treatment of its LGBT+ community.

Members of the ruling Law & Justice (PiS) party have been joined by some Roman Catholic bishops in denouncing LGBT+ rights as a foreign "ideology" that threatens traditional values.

The Polish government did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Last month, a spokesman said there was "no public policy or regulation restricting the civil rights of people with different sexual orientation in Poland".

Biedron said, however, that the Polish government should pay the price for "not respecting the rule of law" within the European Union.

"Because what is the European community? It is about the respect for equality, for freedom and for the respect of minorities," he said.

### ***'The perfect scapegoat'***

Biedron, a former mayor of the northwestern city of Slupsk, ran as a candidate in this year's presidential election, winning 2.2% of the vote after being the target of homophobic rhetoric during campaigning.

"To be honest, I expected (the homophobia)," he said. "But I was an activist for many years, fighting for LGBTI rights when it was really taboo. So to be a candidate and have the support of so many people is a sign of progress."

In parliamentary elections in October 2019, PiS made LGBT+ rights a major focus of its campaign, and critics say the nationalist party has fomented anti-gay and anti-trans sentiment in the country.

"This government won't change its (anti-LGBT+ policies) in coming years," Biedron said.

"They see it works. They are winning elections because they are being homophobic and transphobic, and we are the perfect scapegoat."

Biedron's partner, Krzysztof Smiszek, is a member of the lower chamber of Poland's bicameral parliament.

Both he and Biedron have been active in supporting a new generation of activists, including Margot Szutowicz, whose arrest last month for damaging an anti-LGBT protester's van sparked a wave of demonstrations.

"I keep fingers crossed for this generation," Biedron said, adding that he supports Szutowicz's sometimes-controversial campaigning tactics.

Biedron warned that the Polish government's stance could eventually pose a risk to the country's EU membership.

"There is a danger that one day Poland will make a mistake and be out of the European Union," he said.

"But that would be catastrophic not only for LGBTI people but Polish society as a whole... That's why we need solidarity."

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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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## **Six 'LGBT-free' towns in Poland lose E.U. funding**

***Dozens of Polish towns have declared themselves "LGBT-free" since 2019, and now roughly a third of the country's population lives in these municipalities.***

By Tim Fitzsimons and The Associated Press

NBC News (31.07.2020) - <https://nbcnews.to/30u5QAh> - The European Commission rejected funding for six Polish towns that declared themselves to be "LGBT-free," a growing local trend where municipalities issue resolutions declaring themselves unwelcoming toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

"EU values and fundamental rights must be respected by Member States and state authorities," European Union Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli wrote in a tweet announcing the rejection.

A European Commission spokesperson told NBC News in an email that the commission would not name the six towns, but said there is "a fundamental principle of equality of treatment that is at the heart of our selection processes."

The decision means these six undisclosed towns' applications to "twin" with other European Union cities — similar to "sister cities" in the United States — were rejected. Applications can unlock up to 25,000 euros in funding for conferences and other group-building activities.

"Our treaties ensure that every person in Europe is free to be who they are, live where they like, love who they want and aim as high as they want," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tweeted. "I will continue to push for a #UnionOfEquality."

The issue of LGBTQ rights has recently divided Poland.

Earlier this month, conservative president Andrzej Duda was re-elected by a razor-thin margin with 51 percent of the vote. Duda campaigned against LGBTQ equality, promising that gays would be prohibited from marrying and that LGBTQ issues would be banned from school curricula.

Other cities in Western Europe have already canceled their "twinning" agreements with Polish "LGBT-free" towns prior to the European Commission's recent rejection.

Polish Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro called the rejection "unlawful," urging for a reversal from the E.U. Commission and arguing that the views of all citizens should be respected by the E.U.

The trend began in March 2019 when small towns passed resolutions declaring themselves free of "LGBT ideology." Since then, dozens of towns have followed, and now roughly a third of Poland's population lives in these municipalities.

Poland's "LGBT-free zone" movement has already caused international waves. Last year, under pressure, Carnegie Hall canceled an event linked to a Polish magazine that first circulated "LGBT-free zone" stickers in its July 2019 issue.

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## **French town suspends ties with Polish twin city over LGBTQ rights**

***A Polish mayor on Monday deplored the decision by a sister town in France to suspend 25-year official ties with her town because it declared itself an area "free of LGBTQ ideology."***

France 24 (18.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2HzCeHd> - The mayor of the south-eastern town of Tuchow, Magdalena Marszalek, blamed the rare decision by the French community it had been twinned with, Saint-Jean-de-Braye, on campaigning ahead of local elections there.

She expressed regret that severing ties will cut friendly relations among residents, as Tuchow will no longer be able to sponsor visits by people from Saint-Jean-de-Braye.

Marszalek said many in her community do not identify with the declaration adopted last year by local councilors of Poland's ruling conservative Law and Justice party.

The sister municipality in central France suspended ties last week and said in a statement that "France is committed to combating human rights violations based on sexual orientation ... We cannot accept that the ties that unite our two cities by a twinning oath be tainted. We condemn the position taken by our twin city of Tuchow."

Tuchow was among other towns in south-eastern Poland that adopted the declaration in May saying they wanted to defend themselves against "radicals ... who attack freedom of speech, childhood innocence, the authority of family and school and the freedom of businesspeople."

The declaration came in reaction to Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, an opposition politician, declaring the capital city supportive of the LGBT community and its rights.

Poland's ruling party and other social conservatives say they are trying to protect children and traditional families from being demoralized and corrupted by a growing gay rights movement.

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