



Poland Wants Pardon for Neo-Fascist Behind Pride Attack

By Tim Hume
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Polish Attorney General and Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro ordered the early release of a far-right activist who snatched a woman's rainbow bag ahead of a Pride parade.

Poland's attorney general is seeking a pardon for a far-right activist who carried out a homophobic attack on a participant in a Pride event, stoking accusations that the country's ultraconservative government is legitimising hatred against the LGBTQ community.

Zbigniew Ziobro, Poland's Attorney General and Justice Minister, announced at a press conference on Friday night that he had ordered the premature release from jail of Marika M., who was midway through a three-year jail sentence for her role in a controversial incident ahead of a pride event in Poznań, a city in western Poland, on the 10th of August, 2020.



Marika, a 21-year-old member of the neo-fascist organisation "Front Oczyszczenia Narodowego" (Front of National Cleansing), was part of a group that tried to snatch a woman's rainbow-coloured bag in a scuffle ahead of the event. Marika, whose last name has not been used in Polish media reports in line with privacy laws, was found guilty of attempted robbery, and sentenced to three years in jail in August 2021.

Ziobro, a Catholic hardliner and staunch opponent of LGBTQ rights, including same-sex marriage and adoptions, has championed Marika's case, insisting her sentencing was excessively harsh, and claiming it was disproportionate with those handed to left-wing activists.

"The court threw a young girl in prison for 3 years because she protested against the promotion of leftist ideology and homosexuality," he tweeted on Friday, along with a picture of Marika and a vow that there would be "consequences" for the prosecutors who charged her.

"Courts ruthlessly punish Poles for defending faith and values. They let them go free for attacking churches, beating believers and spitting on police officers."

At Friday's press conference, he claimed that Marika – who has now been released – was the real victim in the case, and that he intended to appeal to Polish President Andrzej Duda for a pardon on her behalf.

"Marika did not commit any robbery," he said. "If we can talk about a robbery, Marika herself became its victim. She was robbed of her freedom, a year of her youthful life spent behind bars."

Ziobro's actions have shocked LGBTQI and liberal groups, who say the attorney general's comments around the case amount to a dangerous endorsement of anti-LGBTQ hate. In recent years, Poland's right-wing populist government has been accused of whipping up hatred against the gay and trans communities in order to fire up its conservative base ahead of elections, which spilled over into violence, including attacks on Pride events.

"This is Poland, the country where wearing a rainbow bag can make you a target for neo-Nazis," tweeted Polish LGBTQ activist Bart Staszewski. "This is the country where the neo-Nazis will get full support from the right-wing government."

Rafal Pankowski, head of Polish anti-extremism group the Never Again Association, told VICE News that Marika's release was being "widely perceived as an example of the normalisation of extreme-right violence and homophobia in today's Poland."

The case has fuelled concerns that the governing right-wing coalition intends to double down on its strategy of attacking the LGBTQ community, as it did during successive election campaigns between 2018-20, painting "LGBT ideology" as a foreign import that posed a threat to the traditional Polish family unit. Poland is due to hold national elections later this year.

Last month, Ziobro's Suwerenna Polska (Sovereign Poland) party, a Catholic-nationalist member of Poland's ruling coalition, sparked outrage when it posted a tweet about a Pride parade featuring a clip of a gun-wielding Chuck Norris and a vow to "protect children from depravity."

Poland is ranked the worst country in the European Union for LGBTQ rights – a position it has held since 2020 – according to the annual Rainbow Europe index released by ILGA-Europe, a Brussels-based NGO. The report's authors noted a lack of legal protections, including no recognition of same-sex partnerships or hate crime laws for gender identity or sexuality, and hate speech from government figures.

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