



GET THE TROLLS

Who Deserves Shelter? (A Polemic by Dawid Warszawski)

23 Mar

This article below was written by Dawid Warszawski with assistance from our partner organisation "Never Again" Association. It has been translated from Polish and was originally published on Wyborcza.pl on 2nd March 2022.

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 1 ZDJĘCIE

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Przejsięcie graniczne w Medyce, 28 lutego 2022 r. (Fot. Patryk Ogorzałek / Agencja Wyborcza.pl)

Screenshot from the article by Dawid Warszawski published on Gazeta Wyborcza

"Gazeta Wyborcza, (a Polish liberal daily - translator's note), has achieved a surprising success: it is being praised and quoted by right-wing websites. Well, maybe not the entire publication, but definitely the article by Rafał Bolanowski *Few Ukrainians at the Border Crossing in Medyka, Poland. Many from Cameroon, Pakistan, almost all males* (of 28 February), which has made headlines on the right-wing sphere of the Internet.

"I wonder how we can check if those scores of 'students' from Africa and Asia at our border, who block the crossing without papers, aren't the same people who were recently treated so well by Lukashenko," tweeted Wojciech Szewko, a self-proclaimed pundit on Islam at National Media (Media Narodowe). "Well, if even *Wyborcza* admits this issue, then something is definitely up and hopefully readers of that paper will get the message," commented one user by the handle of Wąski. Bolanowski's article, as NEVER AGAIN found out, was reposted by other fan-pages which total more than half a million followers, including the fan-page *I love Poland* (liked by 400 , 000 users) and by a far-right Confederacy MP, Konrad Berkowicz.

Bolanowski writes: "At the vehicle border crossing in Medyka, we are told that the Ukrainians do not use the pedestrian crossing." Instead, we saw Pakistanis, Iranians and Moroccans. They claim to be students, even if their command of English and Russian seems quite poor." Once they cross the border, "at the exit of the pedestrian border crossing, there are almost only black-skinned or dark-skinned men, several women and a few children. [They] use the Muslim greeting 'peace be with you'," notes Rafał Bolanowski.

In short, Muslims invade Poland under the pretext of escaping war. And not to blow their cover, they use their sneaky peaceful greeting. "I think this is all used by the same people who recently flocked to the border with Belarus," speculates one of the volunteers we met." The enemy has bypassed our fortifications and entered our city. Small wonder that racists praise the article so much.

Everyone deserves the same kind of help.

Ukrainian universities hosted some 76.5 thousand of foreign students, mainly from Morocco (30%) and India (10%). It is hardly surprising that when war came, they decided to go back to their countries immediately. There were few Pakistanis and Iranians among them, contrary to what Bolanowski claims, but "if their command of English and Russian seems quite poor", maybe he did not make enough effort to interact with them.

What is more important point, however, is that studying is not the only reason to go abroad. And when war breaks out, everyone is in the same danger and everyone deserves the same kind of help. The Polish government deserves praise for declaring that

Poland will accept all people fleeing Ukraine, regardless of their papers. And regardless of their skin colour, but Bolanowski apparently did not get the memo.

“The Medyka border crossing on Monday saw few Ukrainians fleeing the war”. Yes, because the Ukrainian government banned all males aged 18-60 from leaving the country. Hence, the Ukrainian administration sends all males to a separate queue, for obvious reasons with mainly non-Ukrainians, who can cross the border only after women with children. So they wait, for a long time and in appalling conditions, until at last some of them can get into Poland.

Once there, “there are almost only black-skinned or dark-skinned men”. That is because “dark-skinned women” entered first and now try to figure out what comes next. And those dark-skinned men are there also because Polish voluntary workers prefer to take Ukrainians instead of the “dark-skinned” folk. And last but not least, sometimes those men do not know where they are and have nowhere to go. Bolanowski could explain that in his story, but failed to do so. I do not know if the same article was read by the hooligans who attacked “dark-skinned people” on the streets of Przemyśl last Tuesday. I suspect that they did not need additional incitement for their “hunt”. But nevertheless, everyone that publishes their words needs to understand the consequences.

Fleeing from bombs

But what about that “poor command of English” of students and about the alleged Belarussian origins of some of them? Ukraine hosted some refugees, some reached the crossing in Medyka and claim to be students because that is the safer option. But if we believe that fleeing from bombs falling on Ukraine grants rights to shelter, then it is hard not to apply the same logic to those fleeing from bombs in Syria. But one might say, what about Pakistan and Iran, where there is no war? It is true, but we still accept refugees from Belarus, a bloody dictatorship like the two above.

And if some people came to Ukraine from Belarus, let us pause and think just how desperate they are to risk more bombing in order to escape bombs elsewhere. If we had accepted them right away, we could have saved them all the suffering. And if Poland accepts 100, 000 Ukrainians per day, we could easily manage a few thousand from Belarus.

However, as Ukraine is attacked also from the territory of Belarus, it is hard to imagine refugees coming to Ukraine from Belarus – unless helped by the Belarussian government, which currently may indeed raise eyebrows. This is why it is necessary to register people coming from Ukraine with an unclear situation, and later verify their status.

But temporary detention is not the solution, as it is impossible to find any other justification than skin colour. If, instead of greeting them with barbed wire and barbaric pushbacks, we accepted and registered refugees at the Belarusian border, processed their asylum applications and sent home, at the expense of the EU, those who did not match the legal requirements, we would not have this whole issue at our hands right now.

And *Gazeta Wyborcza* could spare itself the embarrassment of being cheered by racists by not publishing articles which cause such embarrassment.”

“Gazeta Wyborcza is one of the first free media outlets launched in Poland at the end of the Cold War in 1989. It is the highest-circulation quality newspaper in Poland. It is published by Agora, one of the country’s largest media groups. Gazeta Wyborcza is pro-European, highly critical of the government and frequently calls for protests against the national conservative PiS government. Its journalists represent liberal and centre-left positions.”

<https://getthetrollsout.org/articles/who-deserves-shelter-a-polemic-by-david-warszawski>