

THE DAILY COURIER

Music festival opens in Poland amid government pressure

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WARSAW, Poland - Young people and opposition politicians on Thursday attended a major annual music festival in Poland that celebrates diversity and tolerance — and which has faced pressure recently from the conservative anti-migrant government.



In this Thursday Aug. 3, 2017 photo released by Never Again Association, young people take a rest between the tents at the Woodstock Music Festival in Kostrzyn nad Odra, Poland. Young people have gathered for a major annual music festival in Poland that celebrates diversity and tolerance and which has faced pressure recently from the conservative government. The "Woodstock Festival Poland," whose name itself reflects its liberal youthful spirit, has struggled with restrictions put on it by the conservative pro-Catholic ruling party, Law and Justice. The three-day event opened Thursday in Kostrzyn nad Odra, near the German border. (Nikolaj Stelter-Szymanski/Never Again via AP)

The "Woodstock Festival Poland," whose name reflects its liberal youthful spirit, is taking place this year in a spirit of defiance due to new restrictions and pressure put on it by the conservative pro-Catholic ruling party, Law and Justice.

The Interior Ministry recently classified the event in Kostrzyn nad Odra, a town near the German border, as "high risk," forcing organizers to hire more security forces. Warsaw has refused the security reinforcements which Germany has provided in past years.

The three-day event features rock concerts and tolerance-promoting events, including anti-racism workshops and a soccer tournament organized by Never Again, a group struggling against a rising mood of bigotry and right-wing extremism in the country. Several leading members of the political opposition also showed up Thursday.

In its 23rd year, Woodstock is the creation of a liberal social campaigner, Jerzy Owskiak, who has butted heads with the government.

Owskiak has said the event was open to migrants living in Germany, prompting the ruling party to tweet in June: "Do you really want to have an event in Poland with the participation of Muslim immigrants?"

Martin Gorholt, a Social Democratic Party politician from a German region bordering Poland, said it was "irrational" for the Polish government to declare the festival a high-risk event and then refuse German help.

"I believe this is an attempt to throw sand into the gears of the great civil society organization which is behind the festival so that it will not be as strong and large as it has been so far," Gorholt told Germany's Inforadio.

http://www.kelownadailycourier.ca/entertainment/national_entertainment/article_d09aaa06-4ea4-5e40-adf9-07401925f594.html