

Poland row: Tusk slams 'hysterical comments'

Written by Julie Levy-Abegnoli on 18 January 2016 in News
News

EU Council chief and Polish President look to downplay ongoing tensions between Brussels and Warsaw.



European Council President Donald Tusk has met with Polish President Andrzej Duda, amid rising tensions between Warsaw and Brussels.

Tusk - a former Polish Prime Minister - insisted that the talks had been cordial and that, "Poland has no enemies in the EU".

Since it came to power following last October's parliamentary elections, Poland's conservative Law and Justice party (PiS) has courted controversy, most recently, introducing laws granting the government control over the appointment of senior figures in public radio and television.

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PiS has also come under fire for appointing a number of its supporters to positions in the country's supreme court.

As a result, the European Commission announced last week that it was launching a rule of law assessment of Poland. The procedure - the first of its kind - was implemented in 2014 after Brussels was accused of not doing enough against what many observers perceived as authoritarian rule by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Tusk however was keen to tone down some of the harsh rhetoric that senior policymakers in Brussels and Poland have recently been using, stressing that it was, "important to prevent politicians in Europe and Poland from exaggerating in their comments" and warning against "hysterical comments - we need to protect the historical event that was us joining the bright side of life [Poland's EU accession]".

Commenting on the Commission's investigation, he added, "I do not want my country to be in a situation where it is criticised and scrutinised. I believe the Commission is acting in good faith and wants to clarify the situation, though I can imagine this goal could be achieved through other methods."

President Duda said, "no one doubts that regardless of who is in power in Poland, we benefit from European unity. We want to be part of the European community in order to build our competitiveness, but also to preserve sovereignty as a community of nation states."

And commenting on the widespread criticism of the recent legislative changes, he called on observers to, "calm down and have a rational dialogue based on facts - real facts, not ones created by the media that have nothing to do with the real situation."

He argued that what was happening was, "a normal sequence of events, what happens after a change of government. These are internal conflicts and I am convinced we will find an understanding among our partners. The lively debate is proof of freedom of expression and that democracy is working well."

Moving on to the UK renegotiation discussions, Duda said he hoped the Britain would remain in the EU, and warned that a Brexit would, "lead to a severe crisis and perhaps even an EU collapse. We must seek a compromise, but a cautious compromise, to avoid undermining basic freedoms and the rule of law."

Duda will debate Poland's constitutional changes with MEPs in Strasbourg tomorrow (Tuesday) afternoon.

About the author

Julie Levy-Abegnoli is a journalist for the Parliament Magazine

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