

Polish abortion plans an attack on EU fundamental rights, warn MEPs

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Several MEPs have pledged their support for the Polish 'Black Monday' pro-abortion campaigners in their challenge against proposals to totally ban abortion.



People attend an anti-government, pro-abortion demonstration in front of Polish Parliament in Warsaw, Poland | Photo credit: Press Association

As Warsaw prepares to debate a law banning abortion, MEPs have rallied behind pro-choice Polish women campaigning against the changes.

Abortion is currently banned in Poland, except in cases of rape or incest, or if the woman's life is in danger, or if the foetus is irreparably damaged. Under the proposed new rules - brought forward by an anti-abortion citizens' initiative that gathered 450,000 signatures - abortion would be illegal no matter the circumstances.

On Monday, thousands of Polish women dressed all in black and took to the streets to protest against the proposed changes.

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Terry Reintke, a German member of the European Parliament's Greens/EFA group, said, "We believe that when the fundamental rights of EU citizens are being attacked, as is the case in Poland, Parliament cannot stay silent.

"Activists have shown in the last few weeks how powerful they are and what a strong voice they have. We want to send a clear signal that their struggle is our struggle. Polish women women are EU women, and we will stand in solidarity to defend their rights."

Swedish GUE/NGL group MEP Malin Björk added, "History has shown that we can never take women's rights for granted. Not long ago, Swedish women went to Poland to terminate their pregnancy.

"When rights are threatened somewhere, they are threatened for all of us. We are in this together."

Belgian Socialist MEP Maria Arena pointed out that denying women access to abortion was also denying them access to health. She stressed that "there could be a risk of death if access to abortion is denied."

Austrian ALDE group member Angelika Mlinar said, "Women's rights are human rights."

The MEPs were joined by several pro-choice Polish activists, including Wanda Nowicka, a former MP and founder of the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning, who said, "We Polish women are citizens of Europe. The European Parliament is our institution and therefore MEPs are mandated to speak on our behalf. This is important because in Poland, there is no political representation of women's rights."

She added, "Without you, we might not be able to exercise our right and defend our freedom and dignity. I hope we won't have to wait long until Polish women regain their right to decide on such an important sphere of their life."

Barbara Nowacka, leader of Poland's United Left, said, "We knew that liberalising our country's abortion law was a dream, but we wanted to start a debate on social injustice for women in Poland, on access to sexual education, contraception and abortion."

She explained that in her country, "Women usually have to travel abroad to terminate a pregnancy and pay a lot of money. Others who cannot afford to do so buy pills online or perform dangerous procedures at home."

She underlined that under the new rules, "A 12 year old girl raped by her uncle would be forced to deliver a baby, or a woman will not be able to find out if her baby is malformed, and will be forced to deliver it and watch it suffer and die."

If the new law is passed, women who suffer a miscarriage could also be placed under criminal suspicion, a very dangerous development, said Nowacka, "knowing how our judges judge and the anti-feminist language the police use."

Kamila Ferenc, a lawyer for the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning, said restrictive abortion laws would lead to "an increased number of illegal and unsafe abortions, possibly resulting in death."

Under the new law, "Doctors, women and even their partners could be criminalised," she said.

Ferenc called on all three EU institutions to support Polish women, warning that if the law was not stopped now, it could "spread through eastern Europe."

MEPs are due to debate Poland's proposed abortion ban in plenary on Wednesday evening.

About the author

Julie Levy-Abegnoli is a journalist for the Parliament Magazine

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