

European Response to Poland-Belarus Migrant Crisis Is Hypocritical

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With thousands of illegal immigrants attempting to storm into Poland from Belarus, European attention has been fixated on the repercussions that President Alexander Lukashenko could face. Lukashenko has manufactured a migrant crisis on Poland’s border, a likely response to the daily pressure Belarus faces from its Baltic and Polish neighbors. What stands out from this migrant crisis though is the European response to it when compared to the similarly manufactured migrant crisis that Turkey frequently conjures on Greece’s borders, most notably in February and March of 2020.

During the recent meeting in Brussels between the ambassadors of EU countries, Polish ambassador Andrzej Sadoś explained the current situation on the Poland-Belarus border. He announced that Poland will present evidence next week to high-ranking European Commission officials and ambassadors on the activities of Belarussian authorities on the border.

Following this meeting, calls for sanctions against Belarus have intensified.

In recent months, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland have been struggling with an increase in the number of illegal migrants entering from Belarus. Lukashenko stated that Minsk would no longer hold back the influx of illegal migrants to the EU because the country has “neither the money nor the strength” for it due to the already existing sanctions.

Despite Lukashenko’s claim that Belarus does not have the resources to deal with the migrant crisis, there is overwhelming evidence that his country is instigating the crisis by increasing flights from migrant hotspot countries, such as Iraq and Turkey, without the need for visas. One Syrian who organized migrants to go from Iraqi Kurdistan to Belarus told the BBC that with the easing of visa rules, “I knew it’s going to be the same as what happened in 2015 with Turkey.”

In 2015, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was in dispute with the EU as he could not

secure enough support for his war against Syria. He allowed hundreds of thousands of migrants to pass through Turkey and flood into Greece until the EU finally agreed to a €6 billion deal to help the country meet the cost of the influx. This was despite the fact that Ankara's funding, arming and training of terrorist organizations, including ISIS and Al-Qaeda, was the very cause for millions of Syrians to flee to Turkey.

Turkey continually violates the deal made with the EU by weaponizing migration against Greece, a long used Turkish strategy. It is recalled that during the 1990s, the then president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, [provocatively boasted](#): "We do not need to make war with Greece. We just need to send them a few million immigrants and finish with them." Despite the EU and Turkey signing an agreement on March 18, 2016, to stem migration and refugee flows to Greece, Ankara never truly stopped the flows. In fact, Turkey instigated a new migrant crisis in February-March 2020 by falsely claiming that Greece was open and by bussing migrants to the border.

The reaction from Europe between the Turkish-instigated migrant crisis and the Belarussian one is starkly different though. Although individual countries, including Poland, assisted in Greece's efforts to deal with the 2020 migrant crisis, the calls for sanctions against Turkey were quickly shot down from all corners of the EU. However, there is a near unison of calls for further sanctions to be imposed against Belarus.

Norbert Röttgen, Chairman of the German Foreign Affairs Committee and Member of the Bundestag, said on [Twitter](#): "We have to sanction Lukashenko much more consistently. His attempt to destabilize the EU is at least tolerated, if not supported, by Putin. The fact that the EU remains silent about this Russian policy is unacceptable." It is recalled that during the 2020 Greek migrant crisis, Röttgen never suggested sanctions against Ankara, but rather called for a renegotiation to reward Turkey with even more money despite having never truly stopped migrant flows to Greece.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen urged EU member states on Monday to impose new sanctions against Belarus, saying: "I call for approval of extended sanctions, possible sanctions on third-country airlines involved. We also want to prevent a humanitarian crisis and ensure safe returns." During the 2020 Greek migrant crisis, the European Commission opposed all sanctions against Turkey, but now with Belarus it is urging for sanctions to be passed.

This contradictory behavior highlights that the EU is not united behind stopping migrant flows, but is rather using the current crisis as an opportunity to target Belarus and even Russia as Aeroflot is being implicated in transporting migrants. As much of Europe is deeply tied to Turkey in the financial sector, they are unwilling to sanction the country. However, Belarus does not enjoy such a privilege, and despite behaving in a similar manner to Turkey, it will likely face sanctions that the latter has always managed to avoid.

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Featured image: Migrants on the Belarusian-Polish border. Leonid Shcheglov/BeITA/TASS

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