

Companies pull ads from TV station after comments on tattooing and sending migrants to Auschwitz



By VANESSA GERA
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WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Prosecutors in Poland are investigating after commentators joked on a right-wing television station that migrants should be sent to Auschwitz or be tattooed or microchipped like dogs, and some companies have pulled advertising from the broadcaster.

The remarks were made over the past week by guests on TV Republika, a private station whose role as a platform for conservative views grew after the national conservative party, Law and Justice, lost control of the Polish government and public media.

During its eight years in power, Law and Justice turned taxpayer-funded state television into a platform for programming that cast largescale migration into Europe as an existential danger. The state media broadcast conspiracy theories, such as a claim that liberal elites wanted to force people to eat bugs, as well as antisemitic and homophobic content and attacks on the party's opponents, including the new Prime Minister Donald Tusk.



Spreading hate speech is a crime under Polish law. While public TV stations were shielded from market and legal pressures under the previous government, TV Republika now faces both.

IKEA said it was pulling its advertising from the station, prompting some conservative politicians to urge people to boycott the Swedish home goods giant. Other companies, including Carrefour and MasterCard subsequently said they were pulling their ads, too.

The controversial on-air statements were made as the European Union has been trying to overhaul its outdated asylum system, including with a plan to relocate migrants who arrived illegally in recent years.

Jan Pietrzak, a satirist and actor, said Sunday on TV Republika that he had “cruel joke” in response that idea.

“We have barracks for immigrants: in Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka, Stutthof,” Pietrzak said, referring to concentration and death camps that Nazi German forces operated in occupied Poland during World War II.

Three days later, Marek Król, a former editor of the Polish weekly news magazine Wprost, said migrants could be chipped like dogs, referring to microchips that can help reunite lost pets with their owners, but that it would be cheaper to tattoo numbers on their left arms.

Pietrzak has since appeared on air. TV Republika's programming director, Michał Rachoń, said the channel deeply disagreed with Król's statement but did not say he was being banned from its airwaves, Rachoń said the station "is the home of freedom of speech, but also a place of respect for every human being."

A right-wing lawmaker, Marek Jakubiak, then compared immigrants to "unnecessary waste." In that case, Rachoń, who was the host, asked him to avoid "ugly comparisons."

Prime Minister Tusk strongly condemned recent outbursts of xenophobia and said it resulted from such people and their ideas being rewarded for years by the former government and by current President Andrzej Duda.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum condemned the "immoral political statements regarding refugees."

"This has gone beyond the limits of what is acceptable in the civilized world," director Piotr Cywiński said.

Rafał Pankowski, head of the Never Again anti-racism association, said he was shocked by the comments but heartened by the disgust expressed on social media and the companies pulling advertising.

"It came to the point where society, or a big part of society, is just fed up with all this hate speech," Pankowski said. "The awareness and impatience have been growing for quite some time."

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