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Women's rights in Poland

“Not one more!” - mass protests in Poland

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Tens of thousands of protesters gathered in more than 70 Polish towns and cities on 6-8 November 2021, demanding, as they did last year, the right of women to choose, after the death of a pregnant woman in Pszczyna hospital while doctors waited for “the heart of the embryo to stop beating”.

Her waters having broken, Izabela went to the hospital on 21 September. Doctors noted the absence of amniotic fluid and confirmed the congenital malformations of the foetus previously observed, deciding to hospitalize her and... to wait. The SMS exchanges between her and her mother, made public on the TVN channel on 3 November are horrible: “The embryo weighs 485 grams. For the moment thanks to the anti-abortion law, I have to stay in bed. And there is nothing they can do. They will wait for him to die or for something [miscarriage] to begin and otherwise I can expect septic shock,” Izabela wrote to her mother on the morning of her hospitalization. And when asked if they gave her anything to induce childbirth, she replied, “They can’t. They have to wait for it to start naturally. Or if not, wait for the heart to stop beating.” In the evening, in a text message to her mother: “They gave me an infusion because I was shaking because of fever. I was at 39.9°C.” “Tragedy. My life is in danger. And I have to wait.” On 22 September at 7.39 a.m. Izabela was pronounced dead of septic shock

Jolanta Budzyska, a lawyer for the family who made the scandal public on 29 October, explained in an interview that the medical error “cannot be considered in isolation from the decision taken by the Constitutional Court” that further restricted abortion opportunities in Poland in October 2020. “Ms. Iza and all the other women in her situation would have been safer if doctors had had at their disposal, without legal restrictions, more methods of treatment in line with current medical knowledge. Today... doctors can refrain from taking such a measure for fear of their criminal liability.”

Since Izabela's death became known, other similar tragedies have been made public by the families. “Waiting for the death of the embryo in the uterus when we know in advance that it will not survive is now a common practice in hospitals. I've experienced it myself,” one journalist wrote.

Mobilizations for women's rights, which last year mobilized more than a million people in this country of thirty-six million inhabitants, have resumed. “Not one more!” “I think, I feel, I decide!” “Abortion is life!” – chanted the demonstrators.

The fundamentalist right wing government has decided to act as if nothing had happened. “People die, it's biology... unfortunately women sometimes die during childbirth,” the new head of programming of the official radio dared to say. Her correspondent commented on the protests, saying, “People will not allow themselves to be manipulated as the leaders of the Women's Strike would like, among others. These issues have nothing to do with politics or with the decision of the Constitutional Court.”

And the Polish Parliament has decided to continue considering a bill presented by Catholic fundamentalists that defines human beings from the moment of conception and thus makes the termination of pregnancy a murder, punishable by a sentence of 5-25 years of imprisonment, and even life imprisonment, both for women and for those who help them, even by providing them with the pills for a medical abortion.

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