

# Poland Ignites Outrage With Crackdown on Virgin Icon's LGBT Halo

- Police detained woman over rainbow-crowned Virgin Mary images
  - Ruling party says religion at threat before EU assembly vote
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People demonstrate with 'Free Ela' posters in Krakow on May 6, 2019. Photographer: Beata Zawrzcel/NurPhoto via Getty Images

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Human rights activists slammed Poland's ruling party after authorities detained a woman who allegedly had images of an icon of the Virgin Mary with a rainbow-colored halo resembling the symbol of the LGBT community.

Police raided the home of Elzbieta Podlesna at 6 a.m. on Monday and questioned her for several hours, saying the images — similar to ones put

up across her town last month — may break a law on offending religious beliefs.

The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights said police used excessive force and may have breached the constitution, while Amnesty International — whom Podlesna has worked with — said authorities detained a “peaceful activist” who has the right to freely express her views.

The raid comes during a closely fought campaign for the May 26 European Parliament elections, where the ruling Law & Justice party is portraying itself as the savior of traditional values on a continent that has lost its moral compass. After pro-EU opposition groups teamed up for the ballot, the government is seeking to energize its core electorate to take part in a vote often affected by low turnout.

“Law & Justice has always stressed its close links with the Church but never on this scale and certainly has never used this tactic in an election campaign,” said Beata Laciak, a sociology professor in the Institute of Public Affairs think-tank in Warsaw. “The party is trying to convince Poles that their religion is under threat.”

## **‘Re-Christianize’ EU**

Since winning power in 2015, Law & Justice has steered Poland away from its western partners. It boosted politicians’ roles in everything from the economy to the justice system and triggered an unprecedented standoff with the European Union over whether the formerly communist country is adhering to the bloc’s democratic standards.

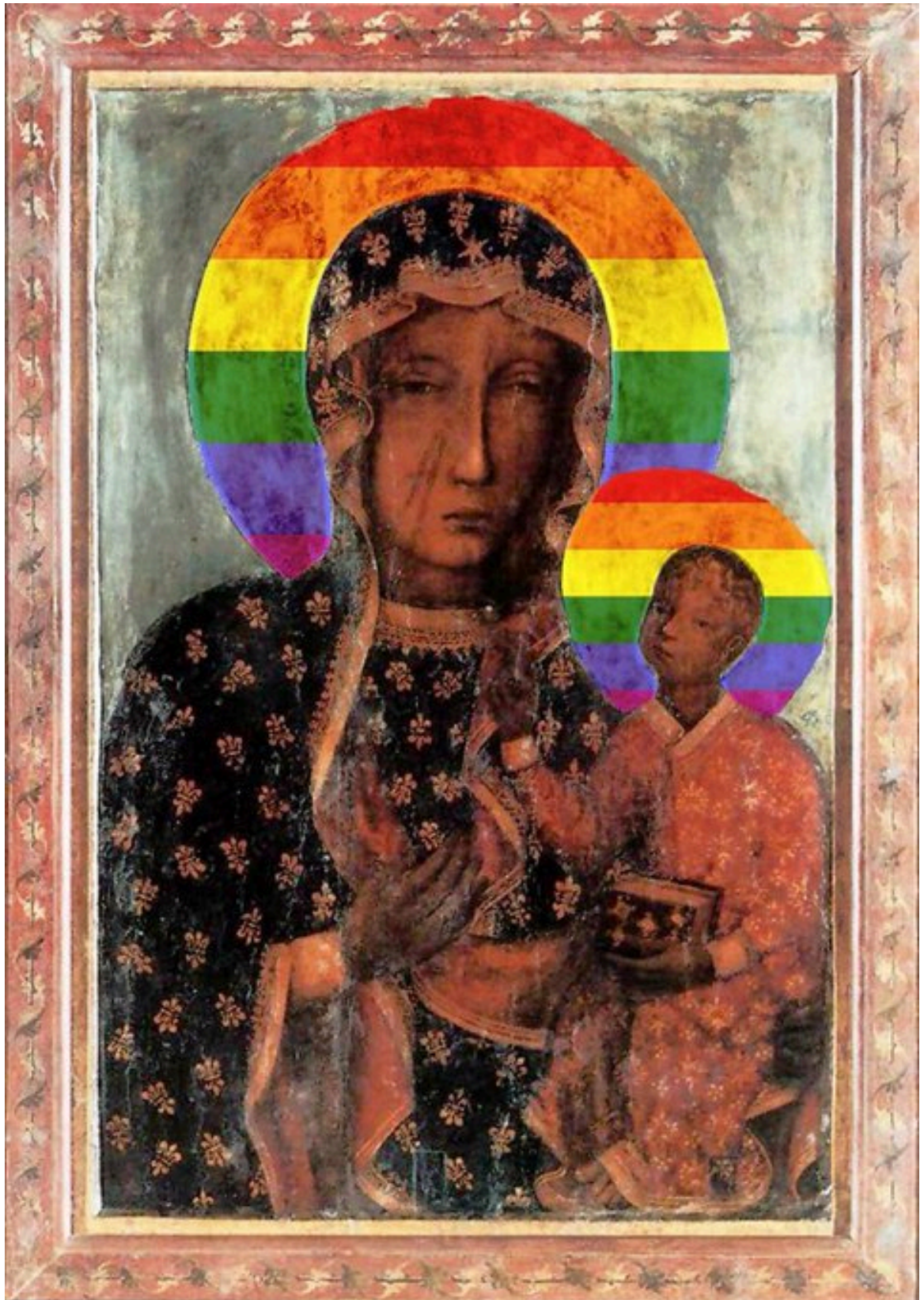


*Amnesty EU@AmnestyEU*

*This morning police in #Poland arrested a woman who had just returned from tours with @amnestynl and @amnestyvl raising the alarm on how the Polish govt is trampling on rule of law.*

*The police claim that she distributed this image, after it was posted around the town of #Płock.*





Images of the rainbow-colored version of the Virgin Mary of Czestochowa, the country's most revered religious icon, have mushroomed across social media since the police detainment. That has shown the government's difficulty to control the issue.

The police said in a statement Tuesday that it's "obliged to respond to any notification, regardless of whether there's suspicion of a crime concerning Catholics or followers of another religion" and that a court would ultimately decide whether a person is guilty or not.

Last weekend, party leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski said the Church was under a "very brutal attack" by the opposition. He warned that "whoever raises his hand against the Church, raises his hand against Poland." Still, Law & Justice's defense of religion has coincided with other acts by Catholics that have grabbed international attention for insensitivity.

In March, a priest in northern Poland burned books, including some from the "Harry Potter" series, and other items including a wooden African mask and elephant figurines whose owners said contained "evil forces." And on Easter, residents in a small town celebrated by beating and then burning a straw effigy of Judas that resembled an anti-Semitic caricature of Jews.

"From Iran through Russia to Spain, England, and the U.S., everyone has noticed this," European President Donald Tusk, a former premier who's campaigning for the opposition before this year's elections, said in Poznan, western Poland. "I need to say it's unbelievable to me as well."

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Source:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-07/poland-ignites-outrage-with-crackdown-on-virgin-icon-s-lgbt-halo>

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