

Poland

Donald Tusk says Poland will shield Netanyahu from arrest at Auschwitz

Polish premier insists ICC warrant will not be enforced after President Duda demands immunity for Israeli leader



Polish President Andrzej Duda, left, meets Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in Warsaw in February 2019 © Radek Pietruszka/EPA-EFE

Raphael Minder in Warsaw YESTERDAY

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced on Thursday that his government would shield Israeli officials, including Benjamin Netanyahu, from possible arrest if they came to Poland this month to commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz.

At the same time, Tusk accused Polish President Andrzej Duda, his political rival, of “completely unnecessarily” turning the ceremony into another domestic political spat before a presidential election in May.

[Netanyahu](#), Israel’s prime minister, faces an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes in Gaza, but Duda sent a letter to Tusk on Wednesday demanding that Netanyahu be granted immunity if he came to attend the 80th commemoration of the liberation of the Nazi death camp on January 27.

The latest confrontation between Tusk and Duda came ahead of a presidential election that Tusk’s pro-EU coalition needs to win in order to unlock its reform agenda. Duda has stalled the programme since Tusk ousted the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party from power in December 2023.

Duda, a PiS nominee, has used his second and final term to block some of Tusk’s bills and stop him from replacing PiS-nominated judges and ambassadors.

The president stressed that he had “honorary patronage” of the Auschwitz commemoration ceremony, which is set to be attended by the UK’s King Charles III and other leaders, as well as some of the last survivors of the biggest second world war death camp, which the Germans built in occupied Poland and turned into a centre of the Holocaust.

Earlier on Thursday, Krzysztof Gawkowski, the deputy prime minister, told parliament “there is no topic today about Netanyahu coming to Poland”.

However, Tusk’s office later said the government was adopting a specific resolution to ensure free and safe participation for representatives of Israel in the Auschwitz event, without naming Netanyahu or referring to the ICC.

Duda underlined the “exceptional nature” of this year’s commemoration, although he did not specifically invite Netanyahu in his letter, which was first obtained by Bloomberg News. The Israeli prime minister, who has previously visited Auschwitz, has not said whether he wants to return this month.

Tusk said on Thursday that the government resolution protecting visiting Israeli officials was “precise” and related only to the Auschwitz ceremony. “It is also very important for us that Poland is not among those countries that openly and demonstratively want to disregard the decisions of international tribunals,” he added.

Last month Polish deputy foreign minister Władysław Bartoszewski said that, as an ICC member state, Poland was “obliged to respect the warrants issued by the ICC”, but he did not confirm that this would automatically require the arrest of Netanyahu.

The international court’s arrest warrants have curtailed but not stopped the movements of some indicted government leaders.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, accused of war crimes in Ukraine by the ICC, decided against travelling to a summit in South Africa last year. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa had said that arresting him would “risk engaging in war with Russia”. However, Putin visited Mongolia, an ICC member state, in September.

In November, Hungarian Prime Minister [Viktor Orbán](#) said he would invite Netanyahu to visit his country despite the ICC’s warrant and the fact that Hungary is also a member. Netanyahu thanked Orbán for his “moral clarity” but the [European Commission criticised](#) his statement.

The head of Duda’s office, Małgorzata Paprocka, told the Polish state news agency on

Thursday that the president had written to Tusk to say that “every person from Israel, every representative of the authorities of this country should have the opportunity to take part in this exceptional event” at Auschwitz.

In response, Tusk called on Duda to stop their public feuding in the final months of their cohabitation and “find other methods than media demonstrations to communicate with the government on such important and sometimes sensitive issues” as Auschwitz.

This article has been corrected to make clear that Putin did not travel to South Africa last year

Additional reporting by Natalia Sawka

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