

EU warns Poland to obey logging ban in ancient forest

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Bialowieza Forest, straddling Poland's eastern border with Belarus, includes one of the largest surviving parts of the primeval forest that covered the European plain 10,000 years ago

The EU warned Poland Wednesday to obey a ban on logging in Europe's last primeval woodland, saying it would add any breach to a broader Brussels case against Warsaw over democratic standards.

Poland's right-wing government vowed on Monday that logging would continue in the ancient Bialowieza [forest](#) despite an injunction issued last week by the European Court of Justice, the bloc's top [court](#).

"If it is confirmed that the logging continues to take place in the Bialowieza forest, the issue will be taken up in the ongoing rule-of-law procedure with Poland," European Commission spokeswoman Mina Andreeva told a press conference in Brussels.

Brussels last month warned Warsaw it was ready to launch an unprecedented procedure to halt Poland's EU voting rights, over court reforms that the bloc says undermine the rule of law.

The EU suspects that Poland's ruling Law and Justice Party, which won elections in 2015, is aiming to impose political control over the courts and to rob them of their independence.

The logging case has so far been separate, but Andreeva said that if Warsaw disobeys the court then Brussels will add the issue to the charge sheet for breaching legal standards.

"This is very clearly linked to the rule of law which our union is founded on," she said.

Andreeva said she had seen press reports that the logging was continuing but added the EU would use its own tools to verify the reports, including satellite imagery.

Polish Environment Minister Jan Szyszko said on Monday that logging would continue in the forest, a UNESCO world heritage site, while Polish television showed footage of machines felling trees there.

The EU took Poland to court in July arguing that the operations were

destroying a forest that boasts unique plant and animal life, including the continent's largest mammal, the European bison.

Bialowieza Forest, straddling Poland's eastern border with Belarus, includes one of the largest surviving parts of the primeval forest that covered the European plain 10,000 years ago.

Warsaw says it authorised the logging, which began in May last year, to contain damage caused by a spruce bark beetle infestation and to fight the risk of forest fires.

Scientists, ecologists and the European Union have protested and activists allege the [logging](#) is a cover for commercial cutting of protected old-growth forests.

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