

Germany Hits Back at Lukashenko on Gay Slur

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BERLIN — The German government hit back at Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko on Monday after his slur on Germany's openly gay foreign minister.

Lukashenko, branded "Europe's last dictator" by German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, lashed out Sunday at European Union politicians who have threatened him with further sanctions over alleged human rights abuses.

"Better to be a dictator than gay," Lukashenko said, according to Belarussian news agency BelTA, in an apparent riposte to Westerwelle.

"Unfortunately, these comments speak for themselves. They say a lot about the mindset of the person making them," said German Foreign Office spokesman Andreas Peschke.

European Union leaders on Friday called for new measures to pressure Lukashenko, including targeting those in Belarus who are responsible for human rights violations as well as people supporting Lukashenko's government.

"[Lukashenko's comment] shows very clearly the position that the Belarussian president takes in relation to basic rights. It's interesting to find out this way that Mr. Lukashenko too now classes himself as a dictator," said German government spokesman Steffen Seibert.

"That, by the way, is a view that the federal government reached some time ago and on which the Belarussian president delivers proof almost daily," he added.

Lukashenko has criticized homosexuality in the past. Last year, after opposition protests against his re-election sparked a crisis with the West, he said: "They've started reproaching me for condemning gays. Well, I don't like gays, and I have said I don't like gays."

Referring to Westerwelle, he said: "I told him frankly, looking him in the eyes. You ought to lead a normal way of life."

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