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Belarus Leader Says EU Refusing to Discuss Migrants

By AFP

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Lukashenko said Germany's Angela Merkel promised him that Brussels would discuss the fate of the 2,000 migrants stranded in Belarus. **president.gov.by**

Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko said Monday that the European Union was refusing to discuss the fate of 2,000 migrants wishing to go to Europe and stranded in Belarus.

The West accuses Belarus of bringing in would-be migrants — mostly from the Middle East — and taking them to areas along its borders with EU members Poland and Lithuania with promises of an easy crossing.

Belarus denies the claim, instead criticizing the EU for not taking in the migrants.

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"I am waiting for the EU to respond on the issue of 2,000 refugees," Lukashenko told officials

on Monday, adding that he expected Europe to let the migrants in.

"They said, (German Chancellor Angela) Merkel promised me that they will consider this problem at the level of the European Union. But they are not doing it," he said, quoted by state news agency Belta.

Lukashenko said European officials refused any contact on the subject despite calls from the Belarusian foreign minister.

"We should demand that the Germans take them in," Lukashenko said.

German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said Monday that Berlin made clear last week that was not acceptable.

"The idea that there could be a humanitarian corridor to Germany for 2,000 migrants... is not an acceptable solution for Germany or the EU," he said.

Earlier this month Belarus cleared a makeshift border encampment, sending 2,000 migrants to a nearby logistics center.

Last week Lukashenko and Merkel spoke by phone twice, discussing the migrant crisis and agreeing to maintain contacts.

The migrants, many fleeing war and poverty, have spent thousands to fly into Belarus on tourist visas. Once at the border, they are faced with squalid, freezing conditions.

The West accuses Belarus of engineering the crisis in revenge for sanctions slapped on Lukashenko's regime after its brutal suppression of protests against his rule.

The migrants say they want to get to Germany via Poland and Lukashenko has said that he is ready to send them there by plane if necessary.

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