

Mass rosary in Poland criticized as anti-Islamic

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The event marked both a religious feast and the Christian victory over the Ottoman Empire.

Thousands of Catholics joined a mass rosary along Poland's 3,600km border over the weekend to pray for the salvation of the country and the world.

The day-long "Rosary at the Borders" took place on October 7th in 320 churches near the Polish border and 4,000 prayer zones. The event was timed to coincide with the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

The organizers said it also commemorated the 1571 naval Battle of Lepanto, when a Christian alliance under orders of the pope, defeated Ottoman Empire forces "thus saving Europe from Islamization".

Archbishop Marek Jedraszewski of Krakow said during his sermon on the feast that people should pray for "Europe to remain Europe".

"Let's pray for other nations of Europe and the world to understand that we need to return to the Christian roots of European culture if we want Europe to remain Europe," the archbishop said.

The event was organized by the lay Solo Dios Basta Foundation ("God Alone Suffices") and supported by the clergy. It was endorsed by celebrities, athletes and several politicians from the ruling conservative Law and Justice party.

But Krzysztof Luft, a former member of the country's largest opposition party, the liberal Civic Platform, was critical of the event. He tweeted on Twitter it was ridiculing "Christianity on a massive scale."

"They treat religion as a tool for maintaining backwardness in the Polish backwater," he said.

Rafal Pankowski, an expert on xenophobia and extremism, said the prayers were an expression of Islamophobia at a time of rising anti-Muslim sentiment in Poland, even though the country's Muslim population is small.

"The whole concept of doing it on the borders reinforces the ethnoreligious, xenophobic model of national identity," Pankowski, who heads the Never Again association in Warsaw, told the Associated Press.

Ninety percent of Poland's 38 million citizens are Catholics.

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