

# The New York Times

## ***Polish Official Criticized Over Jewish Massacre Remarks***

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WARSAW, Poland — Poland's education minister has sparked criticism for appearing to deny Polish responsibility for two massacres of Jews in the 1940s.

Anna Zalewska's comments on Wednesday evening raised questions about the commitment by the populist ruling party, Law and Justice, both to historical truth and to opposing anti-Semitism.

Since coming to power last year, leaders of the Law and Justice party have sent mixed messages on where they stand on issues of tolerance. President Andrzej Duda, who hails from the party and remains an ally, has strongly condemned anti-Semitism at multiple state observances. But some ruling party members have appeared to pander to extreme nationalists at times.

The comments concerned the Jedwabne massacre of 1941, when Poles burned alive more than 300 Jews in a barn, and the Kielce massacre of 1946, in which 42 people died. Anniversaries of both pogroms were marked with observances last week, with Duda condemning anti-Semitism at the Kielce event.

For decades, Polish society avoided discussions of those killings, or denied that Polish anti-Semitism motivated them. Sometimes Germans, who occupied Poland during World War II, were blamed for the Jedwabne killings. A turning point was the publication of a book, "Neighbors," in 2000 by Polish-American sociologist Jan Tomasz Gross, which explored the murder of Jedwabne's Jews by their Polish neighbors and resulted in widespread soul-searching and official state apologies.

In an interview on the public broadcaster TVN, Zalewska appeared uncomfortable as journalist Monika Olejnik asked her whether the massacres should be taught in schools.

"Jedwabne is a historical fact that has led to many misunderstandings and very biased opinions," Zalewska said.

The journalist firmly countered: "Poles burned Jews in a barn."

"That's your opinion repeated after Mr. Gross," Zalewska retorted. She added that the Gross book is "full of lies."

On Kielce, she said the perpetrators were anti-Semites, "but not quite Polish."

Rafal Pankowski, the head of Never Again, an anti-racism watchdog, told The Associated Press on Thursday that his group was "appalled by those comments which amount to denial of the historical truth about anti-Semitic pogroms."

Poland's chief rabbi, Michael Schudrich, said the Jewish community "is stunned and hurt."

The Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish human rights group based in the U.S., voiced "shock and disappointment."

"Minister Zalewska's remarks are appalling, especially coming from a government leader who is responsible for ensuring the education of Poland's youth," said the group's CEO, Jonathan A. Greenblatt. "These pogroms are not matters of historical dispute, and her remarks only enable those who promote Holocaust denial and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories claiming that Jews are trying to damage Poland's reputation with false accusations."

On another matter related to historical interpretation, the powerful ruling party leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, claimed that his brother, the late president Lech Kaczynski, who was an adviser to the pro-democracy Solidarity movement of the 1980s, was actually its "de facto" leader. Solidarity founder Lech Walesa countered Thursday that that is "nonsense."

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