

Israeli ambassador hosts Polish priest accused of anti-Semitism

September 9, 2016

(JTA) — Israel’s ambassador in Poland hosted a Catholic priest who runs a radio station that the US State Department has called a main purveyor of anti-Semitism.

Tadeusz Rydzyk, the director of Radio Maryja, visited the embassy Wednesday, the embassy reported on its website, where he met with Ambassador Anna Azari for an hour.

According to a U.S. State Department report from 2008, “Radio Maryja is one of Europe’s most blatantly anti-Semitic media venues.” A Council of Europe report stated that Radio Maryja has been “openly inciting to anti-Semitism for several years.”

In July 2007, Rydzyk was recorded making “a number of anti-Semitic slurs,” the report also stated. Rydzyk said Jews were pushing the Polish government to pay exorbitant private property restitution claims, and that Poland’s President was “in the pocket of the Jewish lobby,” according to the report.

His statements were aimed at encouraging legislators and popular opinion “against support for a compensation bill,” read the report, which also stated that Rydzyk and his radio station have both come under criticism from several members of the Polish Catholic leadership.

Poland’s Never Again Association, a prominent nongovernmental group fighting against anti-Semitism, condemned the meeting. “Ladies and Gentlemen, this meeting was a big mistake and a disappointment to all involved for many years in the fight against anti-Semitism in Poland,” a spokesperson for the group wrote in a comment by the organization’s official Facebook page on the Facebook page of the Israeli embassy.

In January 2000, Radio Maryja aired an interview between Ryszard Bender, a historian from the Catholic University of Lublin, and Dariusz Ratajczak, a Holocaust denier who claimed that Auschwitz was a labor camp rather than an extermination camp.

In April 2006, Stanisław Michalkiewicz, an analyst with Telewizja Trwam – a television channel headed by Rydzyk that has also faced allegations of anti-Semitism — was quoted by the Gazeta Wyborcza newspaper as stating that “Jewish men are trying to surprise us from behind”, and referring to the World Jewish Congress as “the main benefactor from the Holocaust Industry.”

The embassy in its statement said Rydzyk, whose media reach millions of listeners and viewers, during the meeting praised Israel and discussed ways to solve “the problems of building Polish-Jewish dialogue and protecting the memory of Jewish neighbors” of non-Jewish Poles.

“Rydzyk referenced his many visits to Israel in praising the Israeli cuisine, culture, landscapes and remarkable achievements of Israeli scientists,” the statement further read. “This multiculturalism is beautiful, inspires respect and is the source of the great richness and diversity of Israeli society,” he was quoted as telling the ambassador.

Rydzyk’s visit to the embassy comes amid attempts by Polish anti-racism groups to curb what they regard as the creeping mainstreaming of xenophobia and ultranationalism under Poland’s right-wing Law and Justice party, whose leader Andrzej Sebastian Duda was elected president last year.