

# Los Angeles Times

## Polish police raid office of anti-racism group

By Associated Press  
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Polish police on Friday raided an organization that monitors racism and xenophobia and the private homes of some of its board members, seizing computers.

The head of the Monitoring Center on Racist and Xenophobic Behavior said he considers the early-morning raids on Friday an attempt to intimidate the group and destroy evidence that is inconvenient for the authorities.

"It is a form of revenge against us; they want to silence us," Rafal Gawel told the Associated Press.

He said the group has exposed ties between local officials, prosecutors and right-wing groups in Bialystok, a city in eastern Poland. The group also runs a theater whose program is "not appreciated by the ruling party," he said. It challenges the traditional national values on which the government is focused.

Gawel said he and other board members were "fearing for our lives" after receiving arson threats.

Lukasz Janyst, a spokesman for prosecutors in Bialystok, confirmed there were raids "at a number of locations in Warsaw" and said they were related to an investigation underway in the city into fraud, the counterfeiting of documents and other wrongdoing. The investigation concerns the theater activity that the center's leaders opened in Bialystok and are now continuing in Warsaw.

Gawel admitted that he has been sentenced to four years in prison for business dealings unrelated to the anti-racism center. He is appealing that conviction.

The center has been filing complaints to prosecutors across the nation about anti-Semitic slogans or graffiti and recently it complained to the state broadcasting authorities about an anti-Semitic comment that was broadcast on public television.

Rafal Pankowski, the head of Never Again, a leading anti-racism watchdog, said Bialystok, the most multicultural city in Poland, "has a record of neo-Nazi activities and a pattern of the local authorities not dealing with those issues properly."

"Many serious investigations against violent neo-Nazi attacks have been dropped by the public prosecutor," Pankowski said. "They drop them and then go after the people doing the anti-racism work."

<http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-poland-racism-monitor-2017-story.html>