

# Dark secrets of a Polish tourist mecca



Antisemitic graffiti is sadly a common sight on Polish streets. Some of the language is directed at football teams; in other cases, it is aimed at Jews.



However, in the past few weeks in Krakow, the problem has moved up a gear. Walls and houses across the city have been hit with a wave of antisemitic daubings, and the messages, such as “Jews to the oven”, have been particularly vicious.

In attempt to find what the Polish authorities are doing about it, I sent a series of questions — in English — to Krakow’s police force, the city civil guard, the local municipality and the general

prosecutor’s office.

The police spokesman responded in Polish. He wrote: “Dear Sir, we would like to inform you that the official language in Poland is Polish. Therefore, you are required to send your inquiry in Polish.”

The municipality, the civil guard and the Polish prosecutor’s office did not respond. None found the issue important enough, and were not even interested in finding out where the words “Jews to the oven” was sprayed so that they could delete it.

Paulina Sawicka is one of the heads of the Open Republic association that fights antisemitism and xenophobia. “I consider the Kraków’s police spokesman’s answer ridiculous,” she said. However, she said it did not surprise her. “When the law is broken, we notify the prosecutor’s office. Unfortunately, all too often, here too we do not get support. Sometimes the reactions of prosecutors raise eyebrows.” Ms Sawicka gave further examples of the way the Polish authorities treat antisemitism. “A Court in Opole discontinued proceedings against a law school graduate accused of profiting from fascist publications and gadgets, because a sentence would harm his legal career. The prosecutor’s office in Wroclaw allowed the publication of the Polish translation of Mein Kampf, accepting the explanation of the publisher that selling the book served a ‘scientific purpose’. The slogan ‘we will chase the Jews out of Poland’ was not considered incitement because it did not use the form ‘let’s’. And a swastika was allowed because it was characterised as an ancient Indian symbol.”

Rafal Pankowski, from the Polish anti-racism organisation Never again, agrees that the Polish authorities have still a long way to go in the fight against antisemitism. “The authorities have made some good efforts to prosecute hate crime in the last years, but they have often been half-baked. A much more thorough and concerted effort is needed. In many cases, the perpetrators go unpunished. We think the Polish legal provisions are more or less satisfactory. The problem has been the implementation of these provisions, which is often disappointing.”

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