

Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Radical Far Right In Poland: A Conversation with Rafal Pankowski



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Rafal Pankowski is the Co-Founder of the “NEVER AGAIN” Association based in Warsaw, Poland – an organization which serves as the country’s leading anti-Semitism and anti-racism watchdog. Recently, “NEVER AGAIN” became the target of a radical far-right campaign to discredit and vilify the organization after they publicly condemned a popular national media host who described the Holocaust as “myth.”



This month, the Combat Anti-Semitism Movement sat down with Rafal to discuss a range of issues relating to anti-Semitism in the Central European nation. In our discussion, Rafal offered his valuable insights into his fight against the rise of the radical far-right in the country, anti-Semitism in the media, and a controversial new parliament act which criminalizes discussing Polish collaboration with the Nazis during World War II.

Could you please introduce yourself?

My name is Rafal Pankowski, I'm a Polish sociologist, professor at Collegium Civitas university, and political scientist based in Warsaw. I'm also a campaigner against anti-Semitism and a co-founder of the "NEVER AGAIN" Association (NIGDY WIECEJ) which promotes multicultural understanding and addresses racial and ethnic prejudices amongst young people in Central Europe.

Could you please explain the anti-Semitism you faced?

Our organization has become the target of radical right-wing politicians and the media who have singled us out for the work we do addressing anti-Semitism. After our organization criticized a book by a far-right columnist for its anti-Semitic sentiment, the author along with a news presenter launched a campaign to smear us publicly. This led to the targeting of our organization by others on social media who have claimed our organization is "anti-Polish" or part of a Jewish conspiracy. We also published the "Virus of Hate" booklet earlier this year which documented the rise of anti-Semitism, anti-Asian, anti-LGBTQ, and other types of racism and intolerance in Poland as the result of the coronavirus. This brought on some public vilification from those who disagreed with our views, mostly the far-right.

Why did they target you specifically?

We have been critical of Rafal Ziemkiewicz, a nationalist media host and pundit in Poland, who has published a book describing the Holocaust as a "myth." The book claimed that somehow Jews are deserving of the anti-Semitism that they face in Poland and beyond. As a response to our criticism, far-right political figures and other attackers have portrayed us as being non-Polish, "anti-Polish", of slandering the Polish nation, or being controlled by the Jews. All-of-which is not true. Many of the attacks which have been directed at Never Again or me personally, claim that our organization is part of an international network of Jews seeking to censor opinion in Poland.

Where do you believe this anti-Semitism is coming from?

There are different ways to measure anti-Semitism and of course there are many people in Poland who are not anti-Semitic. However, those that are tend to come from the Polish far-right and accuse Jews and other minority groups of detracting from Polish nationalism. Many of these people believe that Jews have too much power. Some also believe that Jews are not truly Poles or that Jews hate the Polish people. Some of the

anti-Semitism we are currently seeing comes from a recent parliament act whose passing in 2018 was aimed at criminalizing the public discussion of any Polish collaboration with Nazi authorities during World War II. There are people here who don't want to accept their own history and also people who believe that Poles have suffered as much as Jews at the hands of the Nazis and therefore Jews shouldn't make the Holocaust about themselves.

What is the situation like for Jews in Poland today?

Currently, there are less than 10,000 Jews living in Poland (in a country of almost 40 million people) but the hate-speech and hostility towards Jews in the country is greatly out of proportion. There is a phrase used called "anti-Semitism without Jews" which describes the situation. Even though, there are relatively few Jews in the country, anti-Semitism has clearly increased in recent years and much of the hate speech on social media and even in the news is aimed at Jews. Recently, a current presidential candidate in the upcoming elections was discredited by some public television pundits as someone who will be controlled by a "powerful foreign lobby." It is pretty obvious that when they say this or something like "rich groups who want to control the world" this can be interpreted as code for Jews.

Have you received any support in Poland or abroad in this fight against anti-Semitism?

Yes, the Jewish community in Warsaw and other Jewish and human rights groups in Poland have offered its support to Never Again as have many other people in Poland and abroad. What's important to see is the reactions both inside of Poland and outside of Poland. The OSCE recently issue a statement condemning the anti-Semitism in state media during the presidential campaign. But still, a lot of support and reactions are not there in Europe even as Jews and other minorities are targeted.

Please visit <https://www.nigdywiecej.org/en/> to learn more about the important work of Rafal Pankowski and the "NEVER AGAIN" Association as they seek to fight racism and promote multicultural understanding in Poland and Central Europe.

https://combatantisemitism.org/personal_stories/anti-semitism-and-the-rise-of-the-radical-far-right-in-poland-a-conversation-with-rafal-pankowski-co-founder-of-the-never-again-association/