



# Gazeta

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Roman Vishniac (1897-1990) *Albert Einstein in his office, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1942*. Gelatin Silver print. The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, University of California, Berkeley, gift of Mara Vishniac Kohn, 2016.6.10.

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# Honoring the Memory of Paweł Adamowicz: November 2, 1965 – January 14, 2019

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The tragic death of Paweł Adamowicz, murdered on January 13, 2019, while speaking on the stage at the concert of the Great Orchestra of the Christmas Charity Foundation, has robbed Poland of one of its most able and progressive leaders. As mayor of Gdansk since 1998, he was responsible for numerous civic innovations, including Poland's first "civic panel," to develop policies on flood prevention, with residents drawn at random to "raise the level of civic engagement in the areas most challenging to the city." According to Adamowicz, civil society "is not about enlightened absolutism imposed from the top. It takes place through the activism of different entrepreneurs and people of different professions and ideas, as well as through public disputes and conflicts. That is how civil society is created."

Born of parents who emigrated after the war from Vilnius to Gdańsk, Adamowicz became active



Paweł Adamowicz in July 2018. Photograph by Rudolf H. Boettcher. Wikimedia Commons.

in politics as head of the committee that organized the strikes in Gdańsk in 1988, and that contributed to the convening of the roundtable talks culminating in the negotiated end of communism in Poland. He was elected to the Gdańsk city council in 1990 and in 1998 became its mayor, a post to which he was re-elected several times. In 2018, he was re-elected as an Independent, although he had previously been a co-founder

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and member of Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska—PO*).

He made his reputation as a progressive, supporting the settlement of immigrants in Gdańsk, sex education in schools, gay and lesbian rights—in 2018 he was an honorary patron of the fourth Gdańsk Gay Pride Parade, in which he also participated—and the national rights of the Kashubes. As a symbol of his support for women's rights,

he granted the keys of the city to the women of Gdańsk to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of women's suffrage in Poland. As he told *The Guardian* in 2016, "I am a European, so my nature is to be open. Gdańsk is a port and must always be a refuge from the sea."

He spoke out strongly when the windows of the Gdańsk synagogue were broken last year, denouncing the vandalism. In the aftermath of Adamowicz's assassination, all the main Jewish organizations in Poland issued a joint statement. It asserted: "Sadly, hatred is becoming more and more visible and more widely accepted in Polish political and social life. The death of Mayor Paweł Adamowicz is yet another tragic warning signal that in our society, ideological differences, and differences of worldview, can lead—in extreme cases—to acts of physical violence."

The mayor's assassin, a 27-year-old resident of Gdańsk, had a criminal history that included bank robberies and an attack on a police officer. According to reports in the Polish press,

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*—Joint statement issued by Polish Jewish organizations*

he was treated for paranoid schizophrenia while in prison but stopped taking his medication before his release. After stabbing Adamowicz, the assassin seized the microphone and claimed that he had been falsely imprisoned and tortured at the hands of the previous PO government. One of the main claims of the present Polish government, headed by the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—PiS*), is that the courts were dominated by a PO-created mafia, and that this had necessitated the large-scale purge of the judiciary—a claim that led many to assert that the hate-filled atmosphere

created by PiS had led the assassin to commit his heinous act.

Adamowicz had previously been verbally attacked by right-wing politicians. In 2017, the *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-Polish Youth), whose president, Adam Andruszkiewicz, was recently appointed Deputy Minister for Digitalization, published a series of ten "political death certificates" of pro-European politicians. Adamowicz's certificate described his "cause of death" as "liberalism, multiculturalism, stupidity." The prosecutor's office decided that these tacit threats did not constitute a breach of the law, but were rather a form of legitimate criticism of the politicians involved. In an interview with a right-wing media outlet broadcast on the day that Adamowicz's death was announced, the far-right politician Grzegorz Braun described him as a "traitor to the nation."

According to Rafał Pankowski, head of the *Nigdy Więcej* (Never Again) association, an anti-racist campaign group, Adamowicz became a symbol of something bigger than the

attack itself. “He died during a charity event that tries to bring Poles together. As a result, he became a symbol of the death of unity in this society.” In Pankowski’s view, Adamowicz “started to become more and more outspoken on issues of diversity and minority rights and tolerance, just as society was moving in the opposite direction. It was very impressive. He was a very brave man—and he paid for it.”

The government claimed there was no evidence that the attack was politically motivated, and that the assassin had also threatened the president. President Duda condemned the murder as a “hard to imagine evil.” The stabbing was also condemned by other members of the PiS. Less than ten days after the murder, however, one of President Duda’s advisers, on state television, talking about Lech Wałęsa, Jerzy Owsiak (the founder of the foundation that sponsored the charity event), and Paweł Adamowicz, claimed that the public scene was affected by a form of “mystification” that “makes angels of individuals whose behavior raises many questions.”

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*—Cardinal Kazimierz Nycz,  
Archbishop of Warsaw*

It is to be hoped that this tragic event will lead to a diminution of the divisive and abusive character of Polish political life. Cardinal Kazimierz Nycz, Archbishop of Warsaw, at the mass celebrated in the presence of members of the government on the Sunday after the murder, argued that it is vital to “put an end to the wave of hatred, respect the dignity of man, and engage in a reckoning of conscience.” ■

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