

Poland Probes Jewish Website Editor Over a Tweet About the Holocaust

Sam Sokol
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An indictment could mean prison time for journalist Katarzyna Markusz, who skirted similar allegations before. At issue is her tweet stating 'there have never been mass extermination camps for Poles'.

The editor-in-chief of a Jewish news website is under investigation in Poland on suspicion of denying Nazi crimes after asserting that Hitler's Germany never sought to exterminate the entire Polish nation.

Katarzyna Markusz, a non-Jewish historian and journalist who runs the website Jewish.pl, is due to be questioned next week by officials of the Institute of National Remembrance, Poland's state-supported historical research body. At issue is her tweet this year stating that "there have never been mass extermination camps for Poles."

Markusz says she fears that an indictment could follow; she could face up to three years in prison for "undermining the fact of the planned extermination of people of Polish nationality carried out by the authorities of the German Third Reich."

A spokesman said the institute would comment on the issue Wednesday.

A previous investigation into allegations that Markusz had "insulted the Polish nation" was dropped in February; she had said that "Polish participation in the Holocaust is a historical fact."

Critics say the institute has engaged in revisionist history while suppressing dissenting voices in pursuit of a heroic national narrative. Last month historians accused the institute of firing two historians over their Holocaust-era research, leading to condemnations from Yad Vashem and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

"Calling Katarzyna Markusz to appear at the prosecutor's office of the Institute of National Remembrance is a next example of the fight against the freedom of speech and the freedom of scientific research," historian Adam Puławski said in an email. Puławski left the institute in 2018 after what he described as an attempt by his superiors to block his research into wartime Jewish-Polish relations.

Puławski's comments were echoed by historian Paweł Machcewicz, who was forced out of his position as director of Gdansk's Museum of the Second World War four years ago after the government accused him of jeopardizing Polish historical uniqueness by highlighting the suffering of other nations.

"The actions against Katarzyna Markusz remind me of the antisemitic campaign waged by the Polish Communists in 1967-1968," Machcewicz said in an email. "Any honest historian would agree that the goal of the Germans was the decimation of the Polish elites, but not the annihilation of the whole nation ... like in the case of Jews. It is a shame that the Institute of National Remembrance rejects the historical truth and harasses journalists for the sake of promoting the nationalistic agenda."

Historian Havi Dreifuss, who heads Yad Vashem's Center for Research on the Holocaust in Poland, also defended Markusz's comments as historically correct.

“Extermination camps were murder sites designed for Jews,” who were brought to these places from all over Europe, she said. “The Polish government and institutions related to it continue in their effort to distort key aspects of the Holocaust, including attempts to create a false identity between the fate of millions of Jews murdered in the Final Solution and the draconic slavery of Poles during World War II,” she said.

Summoning Markusz for a hearing or an investigation “only proves that the promised ‘freedom of expression’ and ‘freedom of research’ do not exist in Poland,” she added in an email.

The news of the investigation into Markusz was reported by investigative journalism outlet OKO.press on the same day that the institute hosted a talk by science-fiction writer and nationalist journalist Rafał Ziemkiewicz.

In a video on his YouTube channel days earlier, Ziemkiewicz claimed that Jews “have historically been the exploiters, the leeches. There has been no bigger enemy of the Polish peasant than the Jewish middleman who screwed him for cash in every possible way.”

As he put it, “The emancipation of the Polish people required getting rid of those exploiters.”

The inviting of Ziemkiewicz marks one of the institute’s “lowest moments,” said Rafał Pankowski, a Polish academic and founder of the activist group Never Again. “It must be revolting for everybody who cares about the true history of Poland, which includes the memory of the Polish Jews.”

Markusz, meanwhile, says that current Polish memory policy is aimed at “trying to present Poles as victims of the Holocaust” who “had no involvement of any kind in the German policies of extermination.”

“The Polish government wants researchers, historians and journalists not to take up the topic of difficult Polish-Jewish relations,” she said. “Everyone is to be afraid of lawsuits and imprisonment, which is why such investigations are carried out. Nobody wants to be called to the police or to the prosecutor’s office. Even if the investigation is discontinued afterwards, the procedure is humiliating. This is to deter others.”

“If indeed Ms. Markusz is being investigated for this statement that is historically accurate, this is a blatant breach of freedom of expression and research on the Holocaust. We strongly reject such actions and call to rescind them immediately,” Yad Vashem told Haaretz in a statement.

“Moreover, giving a stage to a rabid antisemite like Rafał Ziemkiewicz is a slap in the face of those committed to educate against antisemitism. Yad Vashem calls on all institutions involved in Holocaust commemoration to promote reliable and stress-free historical research and to act firmly against antisemitism.”

The previous version of this story mistakenly identified Katarzyna Markusz as Jewish.

<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium.HIGHLIGHT-poland-probes-jewish-reporter-over-a-tweet-about-the-holocaust-1.10447569>