

Polish Minister Doubles Down on Bill to Ban Human Rights Groups From Schools

Sam Sokol
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The bill making its way through Polish parliament would mainly target groups focused on human rights and Holocaust education, and is being peddled by Poland's nationalist leaders and educators.

Polish officials have doubled down on their support for a controversial measure which would limit human rights organizations and antisemitism watchdogs' access to the country's education system, following the publication of a blacklist of NGOs accused of seeking to "implement a strategy of gradual destruction of social norms."

Calling his country "the greatest victim of World War II," Polish Education Minister Przemysław Czarnek told *The Polska Times* last week that liberal groups were "torpedoing the Polish nation and putting some blame on it for the Holocaust" and that Polish youth had "become susceptible to various manipulations, which are also used by some non-governmental organizations."

His comments came amidst harsh criticism of a list of hundreds of civil society organizations accused of seeking to "implement a strategy of gradual destruction of social norms," compiled by the Malopolska province's nationalist school superintendent Barbara Nowak.

Critics allege that Nowak's document lists organizations likely to be banned following the passage of a controversial education bill now making its way through parliament.

If passed, the law would allow regional superintendents like Nowak to "block classes led by outside organizations, even if they are approved by all parents," according to an explainer published by the website *Notes from Poland*.

Nowak – whose district includes Krakow and Auschwitz – listed the Owicim (Auschwitz) Jewish Center, the Association of Roma in Poland, and the Never Again Association – a watchdog group that fights antisemitism and Holocaust denial, among the groups she found objectionable.

In response to the publication of the list, Auschwitz Birkenau Museum Director Piotr Cywiski wrote to local officials, complaining that banning organizations which are "extremely distinguished in combating discrimination and commemorating history" carried a "serious risk," *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported.

According to the liberal newspaper, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews also objected to the law, saying that it “highly recommended” some of the organizations on the list; while the Owicim Jewish Center declared that the “list is an attempt to defame, slander and hate, and thus may threaten the safety of our institution and its employees.”

The publication of the list also led to a heated exchange in the Polish parliament between opposition lawmakers and Deputy Education Minister Tomasz Rzymowski, who repeatedly stated that such a list did not exist.

“The Polish educational system has been hijacked by far-right ideologues who are trying to turn it into a tool of indoctrination and institutionalized intolerance,” Never Again Association co-founder Prof. Rafal Pankowski told Haaretz on Sunday.

“There is no room for minority narratives in their vision and Holocaust education in particular has been subjected to manipulation, infused with nationalist myths and lies. Czarnek is making a serious accusation and making a judgement without knowing anything about [the groups in question], which is very typical of his mindset.”

According to Anton Ambroziak, a reporter for investigative journalism outlet OKO.press, “the government has been clearing the way for the law that drastically restricts NGO's access to schools for months. We have heard from the minister of education about the need for parental empowerment as well as the demoralizing and harmful content with which children are allegedly attacked. The disclosure of the ‘list of shame’ has shattered this narrative.”

“It turned out that access to schools will be limited along the lines of the worst right-wing prejudices: NGO’s for people with disabilities – yes, but only if they do not emancipate people with disabilities too much. Historical education – yes, but only if it does not contradict the martyrdom, whitewashed version of Polish history. Equal opportunities – yes, but only in conjunction with right-wing, catholic doctrine. And all the content that promotes pluralism, civic involvement, and teaches about human rights, would absolutely disappear from schools.”

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