

Fury Over Polish Government's Appointment of Former Far Right '100% Aryan' Activist to Leading State Post

by Ben Cohen
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Poland's nationalist government was enveloped in yet another bitter controversy over antisemitism this week, following the appointment of a former far-right activist who used the online moniker "100%Aryan" to head a regional branch of the state-run Institute for National Remembrance (IPN).

A storm of protest greeted the news on Feb. 9 that 38-year-old Tomasz Greniuch — one of the founders of the ultranationalist National Radical Camp (ONR) group — had been named as head of the IPN's branch in the city of Wrocław. Greniuch's academic research at the Catholic University of Lublin's history department focused on the wartime National Armed Forces (NSZ), an underground military organization with an openly antisemitic ideology that frequently betrayed Jews in hiding to the German occupation authorities during the Nazi Holocaust.



As a prominent leader of the ONR until 2013, Greniuch openly embraced neo-Nazi and white power symbols and rhetoric. One set of images widely published on social media and in liberal Polish news outlets showed Greniuch at the front of a group of young neo-Nazis who marched through the town of Myślenice on the anniversary of an infamous 1936 pogrom against local Jews.

In one photo from that event, Greniuch was seen with his right arm outstretched in a Nazi salute.

Among those protesting Greniuch's appointment at the IPN was the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw.

"We were surprised to learn that the new director of the IPN branch in Wrocław, Mr. Tomasz Greniuch, sees nothing wrong in using the Nazi salute," the embassy said in a statement. "In Poland, a country which suffered so much under Nazi occupation, there should be no place for Nazi symbols."

Rafał Pankowski — director of the NEVER AGAIN Association, a Polish anti-racist NGO — told The Algemeiner on Thursday that Greniuch "has been on our organization's radar for years."

Pankowski pointed to a book published by Greniuch in 2013 in which he confirmed that he had used the moniker "100%Aryan" as his online name.

The book advocates that "Poland must stay white" and included fulsome praise for Leon Degrelle, a Belgian Nazi collaborator who became a Holocaust denier after the war, and Corneliu Codreanu, the founder of the violently antisemitic Iron Guard movement in Romania before the war.

“In the first weeks of 2020 [in an earlier role working for the IPN in the city of Opole], Greniuch organized an exhibition glorifying the Holy Cross Brigade of the National Armed Forces,” Pankowski said. “It was the only Polish unit which openly collaborated with the Nazis in the last months of World War II and withdrew with them to Germany to escape the Red Army.”

Pankowski argued that Greniuch’s appointment to a senior post within the IPN, whose annual \$120 million budget is taxpayer-funded, “signifies a bigger problem about this institution as a transmitter of far-right nationalist and antisemitic ideology.”

Polish opposition politicians voiced strong disapproval of Greniuch’s appointment. Piotr Zgorzelski — the deputy speaker of the Sejm, Poland’s parliament — excoriated the move as “another example of the flirtation between the government and the extreme right.” Robert Kropiwnicki of the liberal Civic Coalition said that the IPN was “at the heart of Poland’s modern history” and that “someone with a [far-right] past should never be the head of one of its branches.”

There was unease among Polish conservatives too. One individual described as a “close associate” of Jarosław Kaczyński — the former prime minister who is widely regarded as still the most influential person in Polish politics — told the tabloid Super Express newspaper, “I don’t understand how you could do something so stupid.”

“Most of all, this decision hurts Poland,” Kaczyński’s unnamed associate said.

Andrzej Pawluszek, a former advisor to Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, placed his opposition to Greniuch on the record.

“We are dealing with a scandal that is damaging Poland. This man should never have been appointed to this position,” said Pawluszek.

“Nobody will convince me that someone who hails [gives a Nazi salute] is a patriot,” Pawluszek added.

For his part, Greniuch insisted that his far right politics had been consigned to his recent past — a stance strongly supported by the IPN’s management.

Greniuch said in a radio interview on Tuesday night that he apologized for having been “irresponsible and wrong” as younger man, explaining this as “youthful bravado, an uncompromising attitude.”

“From my point of view today, I believe it was a mistake, and I would like to stop there,” Greniuch said.

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