

Israel to Return Its Charge D'affaires to Poland After Holocaust Restitution Rift

Sam Sokol
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Israel recalled Tal Ben-Ari Yaalon in August after Poland approved a controversial law restricting the possibility of restitution claims for property stolen from Jews during the Holocaust.

More than three months after being recalled to Israel as part of an escalating diplomatic crisis between Jerusalem and Warsaw, Israel's Foreign Ministry has confirmed that it will return its charge d'affaires to Poland this week.

Tal Ben-Ari Yaalon was recalled this August for “an indefinite period of time” in response to Polish President Andrzej Duda's approval of a controversial law restricting the possibility of restitution claims for property stolen from Jews during the Holocaust.

Two days later, Warsaw announced that Poland's Ambassador Marek Magierowski, who was on vacation at the time, would not return to Israel and that his children would be returned home for their own safety due to “growing hatred towards Poland and Polish citizens in Israel.”

Magierowski has since been designated ambassador to Washington, with no replacement named for the position in Israel.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman confirmed a report in the Jerusalem Post that Ben-Ari was being returned to Warsaw but declined to elaborate on what had prompted the decision or whether Poland was reciprocating. “All I can say is that we can confirm that we are sending her back,” the spokesman said, adding that assigning a full ambassador to represent Israel in Poland is not currently in the works.

“The decision of the Israeli side has not yet been communicated to the Polish MFA, neither had it been preceded by any consultations or talks with the Polish side,” Katarzyna Rybka-Iwaska, chargé d'affaires at the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv, told Haaretz when asked if Warsaw would reciprocate the Israeli move.

“We are awaiting the official note from the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw and will welcome it as the step in the right direction.”

Issues related to the Holocaust have strained relations between Israel and Poland for several years. For its part, Poland has accused Israel of fostering an atmosphere of “growing hatred towards Poland and Polish citizens in Israel.”

In late October, Warsaw officially endorsed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working definition of antisemitism, in a low-key announcement that was missed by most media outlets in both countries. And this month, it publicly condemned a right-wing nationalist rally in which participants yelled “death to Jews” and burned copies of old documents securing Jewish rights.

Israel’s Foreign Ministry declined to comment on Warsaw’s endorsement of the IHRA definition, while Rafał Pankowski, a Polish academic and founder of the Never Again Association, called it “largely a meaningless move as long as it does not translate into real action against antisemitism.”

“Antisemitic stereotypes and arguments have become common in Polish media and politics in the last years, and the ruling party has contributed to it quite a lot,” Pankowski told Haaretz at the time.

In August, Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Paweł Jablonski said Warsaw was considering limiting Holocaust commemoration trips for Israeli students because the Israeli education system had been producing “propaganda based on the hatred of Poland, which permeates the minds of young people from an early age at school.”

In 2019, Warsaw pulled out of an important diplomatic conference in Jerusalem after then-Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz said that Poles “suckled antisemitism with their mother’s milk.” The cancellation of the summit was a stunning reversal from the previous year, when then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to endorse a Polish narrative of the war years and released a joint statement with his Polish counterpart, Mateusz Morawiecki, defending Poland’s wartime record.

That statement was itself an effort to repair ruptured ties after Jerusalem condemned Poland for a controversial 2018 law that made it illegal to hold the Polish nation, people or state responsible for Nazi war crimes.

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