



POLAND 2007

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THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

There are some 5,000–10,000 Jews in Poland out of a total population of close to 40 million. The majority live in Warsaw, Wrocław, Krakow and Lodz, but there are smaller communities in several other cities. There are virtually no Jews in the eastern part of Poland where once large, important communities, such as those of Lublin and Białystok, existed.

The Union of Jewish Religious Communities (Związek Kongregacji Wyznania Mojżeszowego), or Kehilla, and the secular Jewish Socio-Cultural Society (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydowskie), or Ferband, are the leading communal organizations and these, together with other Jewish groups, are linked by membership in the KKOZRP, which acts as a roof organization. There is a Jewish primary school in Warsaw maintained by the Lauder Foundation, which has been active in rehabilitating Jewish life in Poland, especially through youth projects. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint) is also active in Poland, particularly in social welfare. The leading Jewish publications are the monthly *Midrasz*, *Dos Jidische Wort*, *Jidele* for youth and *Sztendlach* for primary school children. All of these publications appear in Polish, except for *Dos Jidische Wort* which is published in a bi-lingual Yiddish-Polish edition.

Important institutions are the Jewish Historical Institute, with its revamped museum, the E.R. Kaminska State Yiddish Theater in Warsaw and the Jewish Cultural Center in Krakow. There are centers for Jewish studies in Warsaw University and the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

On June 26, 2007, Polish President Lech Kaczyński laid the foundation stone for a Museum of the History of Polish Jews at the site of the former Warsaw ghetto. Kaczyński said that the museum, which will depict over a thousand years of Jewish life in Poland, will serve to overcome mutual lack of knowledge and a chance to reconcile. The museum is scheduled to open in 2009.

PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS

Populist political parties that employed antisemitic rhetoric suffered a defeat in the October 2007 parliamentary election. Although radical nationalists have since been in disarray they have maintained their influence in some key state institutions, including public TV and the Institute for National Remembrance. For example, Piotr Farfál, a member of the MW and LPR (see below) and former publisher of the neo-Nazi skinhead fanzine *Front*, continued to serve as deputy chairman of the board of state TV. Another well-known extreme right activist Mariusz Bechta has a position at the influential Institute of National Remembrance (for an example of its activity, see below). In his own journal *Templum Novum*, Bechta regularly publishes extremist material such as speeches of the late Belgian Waffen-SS general and Holocaust denier Leon Degrelle. According to the magazine of the anti-fascist Never Again association (*Nigdy Wiecej*) of the same name, *Templum Novum* received a state subsidy from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage during the period of the Kaczyński-led government (2006–7).

Political Parties

The far right League of Polish Families (LPR), led by Roman Giertych, who prior to the election was Poland's deputy prime minister and minister of education, received a mere 1.3 per cent of the vote, failing to elect a single MP. In a last desperate move before the poll, the LPR resorted to open antisemitism by producing paid TV spots blaming Israeli interests for Polish participation in the Iraq war and showing the LPR's former ally – and now rival – President Lech Kaczyński, wearing a kippa on a visit to Jerusalem's Western Wall. Several weeks before the election, Marcin Komak, chairman of the Never Again Association, discovered and published an article that Giertych had written several years previously for a publication of the All-Polish Youth organization (which he had led – see below) in which he applied the term *parchy* to describe his political opponents. The word was once used to refer to a skin disease but since the early 20th century, has been used by antisemites as a derogatory term for Jews. Giertych stepped down from his leadership post after the election, leaving the LPR ridden with conflict over its future political direction (see also below).

Andrzej Lepper's Self-Defense was another radical nationalist party that had been a member of the ruling coalition. Its electoral slate included Zygmunt Wrzodak, the notoriously antisemitic former trade union (Solidarity) activist, as well as Leszek Miller, a former post-Communist prime minister. It received only 1.5 per cent of the vote and lost all its parliamentary seats. After the election Mateusz Piskorski, who

was the Self-Defense national spokesman, announced the party's intention of building a new "patriotic left" movement. Piskorski has begun by establishing close cooperation with the marginal New Left (NL) group. Piskorski himself has a neo-Nazi-skinhead and black metal background. He was involved in the neo-pagan Niklot Association (see [ASW2005](#)) and maintained close links with extremists across Europe, in particular, with the Eurasian Movement of Russian National Bolshevik leader Aleksandr Dugin.

The Law and Justice (PiS) party of the Kaczynski brothers fared better and, with 32 per cent of the national vote, became the main opposition party. Although more moderate in its political outlook than its former allies, it, too, has several activists with a radical nationalist background, including some former members of the LPR and Self-Defense. The PiS has maintained its strategic alliance with Radio Maryja, the mass-audience nationalist Catholic radio station and a key force on the far right. For example, the PiS parliamentary faction numbers several MPs who are members of the National Popular Movement (RLN), which is closely aligned with Radio Maryja's director, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk (see below). Ryszard Bender, a retired history professor at the Catholic University of Lublin and a former LPR member, was elected to the Senate as a PiS representative. In 2000 Bender had claimed in a Radio Maryja broadcast that Auschwitz was not a death camp. President Lech Kaczynski appointed him as honorary chair of the first session of the newly elected chamber on November 5, 2007, a move that provoked strong criticism, among others, from Marek Edelman, the sole surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Extra-parliamentary groups

The National Rebirth of Poland (NOP) remains the most aggressively antisemitic organization in Poland. In 2007 it organized several violent racist and homophobic marches, including a counter-demonstration and attack on anti-racist demonstrators in Wroclaw on March 21. The NOP is involved in international activities through the extreme right European National Front (ENF).

The National Radical Camp (Oboz Narodowo Radykalny – ONR) appeals mostly to young neo-Nazi skinheads. Using the name of an antisemitic organization banned in Poland in 1934, it organizes violent marches and counter-demonstrations, as well as an annual celebration of the 1936 Myslowice pogrom (see below).

All-Polish Youth (Mlodziez Wszechpolska – MW) is the official youth organization of the LPR. Its name goes back to an antisemitic youth group active in the 1920s and 1930s. In recent years the MW has been involved in a large number of scandals, with numerous activists photographed giving the Hitler salute at its meetings. Since the LPR's electoral defeat, the MW's importance has decreased but the organization has made an effort to maintain its youth-oriented nationalist activities and street presence.

The antisemitic publisher Leszek Bubel is leader of the small Polish National Party (PPN). His mass-circulation publications, such as the weekly *Tylko Polska* (Only Poland), are distributed by the government-owned company Ruch, despite many protests over the years from anti-racist and human rights groups, both nationally and internationally.

Racist Activity

A neo-Nazi concert took place on June 16-17 in Krasne Folwarczne, with the participation of some 200 neo-Nazis from various countries. The police did not intervene, as the concert took place on private property. The British band No Remorse, affiliated to the transnational neo-Nazi organization Blood & Honour (B&H), took part.

On April 29, prior to a march against racism in Lodz in which only ten anti-fascists participated, a dozen or so neo-fascists shouted racist slogans, insulted the group, beat them and stole their flags and banners.

The Polish neo-Nazi hit list "Redwatch," operated by B&H, continued to post threats against members of ethnic and sexual minorities, journalists, teachers of Holocaust education and human rights activists (see [ASW2006](#)).

ANTISEMITIC ACTIVITY

According to *Never Again*, there were 149 racist incidents in 2007, most of them antisemitic in nature, including cemetery desecrations, antisemitic demonstrations and antisemitic slogans at football matches. The association also reported about 500 racist and xenophobic Polish websites that were online. (It should be noted that, unlike other European countries, Poland is characterized by a relatively homogeneous population, with little immigration.)

There were several cemetery desecrations. Some 200 gravestones in the Jewish cemetery at Czestochowa were defaced in August with swastikas, Nazi symbols, drawings of a Star of David in a noose, and the slogan "Jews out." Polish President Lech Kaczynski condemned the act. Catholic teenagers and members of the Jewish community cleaned the cemetery. Swastikas were painted on five gravestones in the Jewish cemetery at Augustow, northwestern Poland, in April and over ten tombs dating from the 19th and 20th centuries were broken in the small Jewish cemetery in Swidwin, western Poland, in March.

Graffiti such as "Gas the Jews" appeared on Lodz schools, buildings, buses and shops on March 14. Some 60 non-Jewish Polish teenagers demonstrated in protest outside the city hall.

On April 14, two days before the traditional "March of the Living" took place between Auschwitz and Birkenau, the extreme right antisemitic ONR staged a demonstration, with 200 participants in Krakow, under the banners "Poland for the Poles" and "Poland is not Israel." Although the demonstrators used illegal "Heil Hitler" and other Nazi slogans and shouted "Jews out of Poland," the police did not intervene. They were reportedly outnumbered by 250 anti-racism protesters led by local NGOs. A similar demonstration of about hundred ONR activists was held on June 30, in Myslowice, to celebrate the 71st anniversary of antisemitic riots in the town. The trial of organizers opened on October 10 and was ongoing.

On March 2, during a Cracovia Krakow vs. Legia Warszawa football game opening the first league's spring season, some Warsaw fans shouted at the host team: "Jews, Jews, Jews, all Poland is ashamed of you." At another match, held at at Oswiecim (Auschwitz), on June 24, neo-Nazi fans displayed four banners on the fence, bearing neo-fascist and racist symbols. These were the Celtic cross and numbers "88" (code

for "Heil Hitler") and "14" (the code of the racist terrorist American group the Order); the "falanga" banner (with the symbol of a Polish fascist movement); the American confederate flag; and the German imperial flag. Security forces did not intervene.

Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and former leader of the LPR Maciej Giertych (father of Roman – see above) published in Brussels, Poland and on the Internet an antisemitic pamphlet under the EP logo and using EP funds. The text describes the Jews as living in "programmed separateness," and claims that they migrate from poorer communities to settle among other civilizations "preferably among the rich." Various EP leaders, including German head of the Socialist parliamentary group Martin Schulz, condemned the booklet and called for an investigation into its funding. In July, Giertych said in an interview with the Polish daily *Zycie Warszawy* that German Chancellor Angela Merkel was like Hitler but was more sophisticated in her attempts to gain German domination of Europe.

In response to a potential compensation deal over Jewish confiscated property in July, Roman Catholic priest Tadeusz Rydzyk, the owner of Radio Maryja, stated: "You know what this is about: Poland giving [the Jews] \$65 billion. They will come to you and say, 'Give me your coat! Take off your trousers! Give me your shoes'." The prime minister's office condemned the statement and over 600 Polish Catholic intellectuals, journalists, priests and activists signed a letter of protest. A few days later, Rydzyk denied the charges, claiming he would never speak out against a people's religion or race. The Rome-based Redemptorist order, to which Rydzyk belongs, publicly supported him. Polish prosecutors decided in 2008 not to press charges against him due to lack of evidence.

RESPONSES TO RACISM AND ANTISEMITISM

Legal Activity

State institutions made little progress in counteracting racism in 2007. No racist group was banned; however, there were a few convictions in the courts for racist behavior. For example, in November police arrested a 30-year-old football fan of Widzew Lodz, accused of involvement in eight incidents of propagating fascism by giving the Hitler salute and shouting fascist slogans in public, between April and June 2007. The man pleaded guilty; he was sentenced to two years imprisonment, suspended for three years and fined 800 PLN (200 euro). He had previous convictions for robbery and violent assault.

Marcin G. was sentenced to 18 months in prison, in September, for antisemitic attacks, antisemitic insults and death threats against neighbors. Marcin is a former member of an extreme right group and already served a one year prison term for assault.

Official and Public Activity

On August 26, the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of the Nazi ghetto in Kielce (August 1942), a menorah-shaped monument was unveiled to commemorate the 20,000 local Jews murdered there during the Holocaust. The ceremony was attended by the city mayor, residents and representatives of the German and Israeli embassies. The monument was designed by Marek Cecula, himself a Holocaust survivor and son of a survivor of the the killings.

The Polish parliament held a ceremony honouring 97-year-old Irena Sendler and the Polish Underground Council for Assisting Jews (ZEGOTA). Sendler saved many Jewish children during the Holocaust.

Polish prosecutors opened an investigation, in July, against members of Poland's former Communist Party for inciting antisemitism in the late 1960s, which caused 11,000 thousand Jews to leave Poland. Researchers at the Institute of National Remembrance found extensive archival documents proving that Communist leaders had made public accusations against Jews during 1968-9 in Lodz. For example, former Communist Party General Secretary Wladyslaw Gomulka had said on several occasions that the Jews in Poland were an "imperial-Zionist fifth column."

A group of Roman Catholic bishops in Poland has reportedly recommended the removal of Father Tadeusz Rydzyk from his position as head of Radio Maryja. The decision was made at a meeting of bishops at the Jasna Gora monastery in Czestochova. On September 4, during a speech published in Polish newspapers, Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, archbishop of Krakow, called on his fellow Church leaders to take action against Rydzyk for inciting antisemitism and to "create a new management in Radio Maryja and [the TV station] Trwam."

British Holocaust denier David Irving was asked to leave the Warsaw International Book Fair, in May, by Grzegorz Gurowski, head of the company that organized the event. Irving came to promote his book at the booth of Focal Point, a UK firm that publishes his books. Gurowski said Irving's message contravened Polish law. Irving left under protest.

The struggle against racism is carried out mostly by non-governmental groups. For example, besides its anti-racist magazine, the Never Again Association provides information to journalists and researchers on problems of racism and xenophobia. It has also launched the "Delete Racism" project, designed to combat racism and antisemitism on the Internet. Additionally, it has conducted educational campaigns, such as "Music against Racism" and "Let's Kick Racism out of the Stadiums." In cooperation with Collegium Civitas, a Warsaw-based academic institution, Never Again runs a national hate crime monitoring program.