

GPAHE GLOBAL PROJECT AGAINST HATE AND EXTREMISM

Polish Independence Day March Likely to Lead to Far-Right Violence

November 5, 2021

Facebook and Twitter Must Act Responsibly, Protect Their Users and Democracy by Removing Organizing Pages for the March.

Update posted on December 10, 2021: After we published this piece and engaged in additional advocacy with the technology companies involved in promoting the traditionally violent far-right demonstration in Warsaw, PayPal blocked the account of the Independence March Association. Twitter and Facebook took no action.

In recent years, the Polish Independence Day March has attracted tens of thousands of participants led by far-right extremists and hate groups from Poland and many other countries, making a name for itself as one of the largest far-right gatherings in the world. The annual march, which often descends into violent clashes, is similar to what the U.S. witnessed at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Va., but on a much larger scale, with up to 250,000 participants taking to the streets in recent years.



The march has turned into a magnet for the global far right.

“It’s hard to escape the antisemitic, white nationalist, and anti-LGBTQ hate spewed among the red clouds of smoke billowing from rockets and flares shot off by marchers,” said Wendy Via, co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism.

In 2020, as in previous years, there were multiple injuries during the march, including among police officers. Along the route of the march, a flat was set on fire because of a rainbow flag displayed in a window at the building.

This year again, Facebook and Twitter are both playing a role in promoting and fundraising for the march, by allowing the pages operated by its organizers. A few years ago, the “Independence March” fan page was removed, but quickly restored to Facebook.

Global Project Against Hate and Extremism and the NEVER AGAIN Association, based in Poland, want to see the promotion and fundraising for this event on Facebook and Twitter stopped immediately.

This year, there is even a greater threat of violence, especially against women. The march, slated for November 11, has been banned by the Polish courts and a women’s demonstration is scheduled to take place along the same route instead. Although Warsaw mayor Rafal Trzaskowski has said “if the nationalists congregate on November 11, it will be unlawful assembly,” the organizers said they are planning on marching and will not change their route despite the court’s ban.

“The fact this event has drawn so many far-right groups with a tacit support of the ruling party, and that extremists from around the world travel to participate illustrates the crisis of democratic values in Poland and elsewhere,” said Rafal Pankowski, co-founder of the NEVER AGAIN Association.

Even with this year’s march banned by the courts, Facebook is maintaining an event page promoting a potentially violent event already deemed illegal by the Polish courts. The page has more than 257,000 followers. Among many other posts, their pinned post advertises and fund raises for the event, calling for supporters to “HELP US organize the biggest patriotic manifestation in Europe.”

The Facebook page also links to an interview from a representative of the far-right Ordo Iuris, again with links to fundraise for the march.

Twitter has a much smaller presence in Poland, but the tech company is also allowing for the promotion of and fundraising for this event, on a page that has more than 25,000 followers.

The main organizer, Roman Bakiewicz, with more than 26,000 followers himself also posts about the upcoming march.

In light of the recent Facebook document leaks, there is no question that hateful non-English content has a much greater chance of remaining on the platform. A Washington Post study showed that Facebook’s algorithm drives polarizing and negative political content in Poland. And from GPAHE’s earlier reporting, we know that Twitter has allowed antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ content to remain.

Facebook and Twitter have allowed the march’s organizers to promote and fundraise for this hateful event for years.

“Facebook and Twitter claim they have systems in place to get hate off their platforms and moderate content in potentially violent situations — they need to walk their talk,” said Via. “These companies must act and stop their platforms from promoting a far-right, unlawful event that is definitely going to spread hate and will likely once again turn violent.”

Both NEVER AGAIN and Global Project Against Hate and Extremism have contacted Facebook and Twitter to ask that they do not allow for promotion of or fundraising for this march on their platforms.

<https://globalextrémism.org/post/polish-independence-day-march-likely-to-lead-to-far-right-violence>