

## Polish racism in a Mazurian kebab shop

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**It started with a firecracker – and ended with a knife to the stomach. The tragedy in Elk is the result of extreme right-wing propaganda.**

Place: Elk, a sixty-thousand strong city in the Polish region of Mazury. Time: the last night of the year. Action: A bar brawl ended with the death of a twenty-one-year-old Polish man. Sadly, this is nowhere near an isolated occurrence: not so long ago, similar incidents of bar brawls escalating to knifing to death took place in Sopot, Radom and Warsaw. But the Elk stabbing is special nonetheless: it sparked riots lasting for two days now. Lynching almost took place, more than thirty people were arrested, a wave of hatred is sweeping social networks, nationalist organizations urge revenge against the supposed murdered. Why? Simple: the accident took place in front of a kebab shop and foreign workers from the fast food took part in the incident.

Obviously there is no way to justify the actions of the Tunisian suspected of murder – you just do not solve a dispute in front of a kebab shop with a knife (with the possible exception of self-defense). It is up to the court to clarify what happened.

We cannot condone the murder – but we can try to understand the anxiety that lead to this desperate act.

Should the kebab shop worker have become yet another foreigner brutally beaten up in Poland? Just another victim of a racist attack like those in Poznan, Wrocław, Łódź, Warsaw, Gdansk? The attacks keep occurring more and more often in just about every larger city in Poland: during the last year, the amount of racially or religiously motivated attacks rose by forty per cent.

### **Catholic fundamentalism on the rise**

It is not difficult to connect the dots and realize the relation of these attacks to the politics of the ruling party Law and Justice (PiS), to the deluded raving of Jarosław Kaczyński about zones of Sharia law in Sweden and to the declared unwillingness to accept refugees from Syria. And, primarily, to Kaczyński's constant flirting with nationalists, racists and preachers of violence – like the Member of Parliament Paweł Kukiz or the extremist right-wing movement Ruch narodowy. Those who incited the riots feel their violence is being officially blessed by higher echelons. Mariusz Błaszczak, the Minister of Interior, even went as far as to claim that the attitude of people trying to lynch the supposed perpetrator is “perfectly understandable”.

But it is not islamists spreading terror in Polish streets – it's white Polish Catholics.

“We'll kill you, fucking Muslim!” was what George heard while being beaten up and kicked on the ground in Poznan. In Warsaw, the waiter Karim was assaulted with shouts of “Go back home, terrorist!”. It is not even necessary to be a Muslim, it's enough for Polish nationalists to think you

look like one- in Wrzeźno a twenty-four-year-old man attacked a married couple from India, while in Krakow and Wrocław it was Sikhs who paid for wearing their traditional turbans.

So how about the victims of ethnic tensions on the Polish side? Until the 31<sup>st</sup>, there was not a single one. Daniel R. is the first. His death tops the wave of hatred driven by nationalists - both those in the streets and those wearing suits and sitting in Parliament's benches. It is they who are responsible for this death; they are as guilty as the hand that wielded the knife. Finding evidence is as simple as taking a look at the Facebook profiles of extremists like Robert Winnicki, Marek Jakubiak or the already mentioned Kukiz, looking up their media appearances on the topic of Muslims - and reading the statements issued by their organizations regarding the Elk incident. The atmosphere in Poland grows ever thicker - and it is they who carry the blame.

### **Just who is the threat around here?**

I remain convinced that should the incident have involved a Polish entrepreneur running a pizzeria who killed a thief attempting to rob him, the Internet would be abuzz with proud declarations of the right to defend one's property. But in the Polish chain of social hierarchy, the white bandit seems to have a certain kind of immunity. The excluded excludes another in order to finally get above someone. It raises one's dignity and it means one can get at least a bit of pride out of his ethnicity, if nothing else.

So there is nothing to justify the victim's actions either.

According to the website [elk24.pl](http://elk24.pl), the youth rushed into the kebab shop and stole two drinks while his friend threw a firecracker inside. The attacker acted like a typical Polish football hooligan: with a firecracker in hand and a big mouth thanks to his buddy behind his back. But he got really unlucky.

The Polish Muslims are a tiny minority, numbering less than thirty thousand. A lot of them are very well integrated - doctors, vets, businessmen or students - and what is important here, there is no religious fundamentalism among them. Which is more than can be said for the Catholic majority. The fairy tales about the Islamization of Poland are pure fantasy. The real and much more dangerous threat on Polish streets is the one presented by white nationalists - and not just for the people with darker skin. For gays, lesbians, squatters, feminists and left-wingers of all kinds the encounters with members of this group often end up being rather brutal. The activities of the Polish extreme right are being documented in detail in the Brown Book published by the association "Nigdy Więcej" (Never Again).

### **Waiting for the real terrorists**

There is one more - purely technical - factor to this. By condoning assaults on Muslims we are asking for an actual terrorist attack in our part of Europe - not committed by the common, honest immigrant but his polar opposite: a radicalized religious fundamentalist, produced by our own hatred.

How long can we keep tormenting people in the name of our fearful delusions - and without any reprisal or consequence? How long can we keep insulting and attacking our visitors? Destroying their store fronts, spraying hateful inscriptions upon their doors, beating them up in the streets, robbing them? Elk had to call for reinforcements by the police and the army. 2017 is off to a pretty bad start.

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<http://politicalcritique.org/cee/poland/2017/polish-racism-in-a-mazurian-kebab-shop/>