

Antisemitic Priest Attends Israeli Independence Day Event in Poland

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Jul 5, 2023

Father Tadeusz Rydzyk has called Jews ‘greedy’ and his Catholic radio station accused Jews of responsibility for the Holocaust, but he still found himself as a guest at an Israeli embassy event in Warsaw.

A controversial Roman Catholic priest known for his antisemitic views attended an official reception for Israel's Independence Day in Warsaw last month, where he mingled with Israeli diplomats, Polish government officials and representatives of the local Jewish community.



Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, who runs the Catholic radio station Maryja, has repeatedly been accused of promoting antisemitism over the years, with a U.S. State Department report from 2008 describing the outlet as “one of Europe’s most blatantly anti-Semitic media venues.”

In recent years, Rydzyk has taken several steps to distance himself from this image, including meeting with then-Israeli Ambassador to Poland Anna Azari in 2016 and joining efforts to open a museum exhibiting accounts of Polish Christians who saved Jews during the Holocaust.

Despite this, Radio Maryja has continued to broadcast antisemitic content.

In a 2021 broadcast, a guest claimed that a “coordinated historical policy” between Germans and Jews had led to the “falsification of history” by a “fifth column in Poland.”

In another segment from 2018, a far-right Polish historian claimed that “Jews have a lot to hide” about the “shameful participation of Jews in the destruction of their own people.” Jews, the guest added, “have always loved Germans.”

Rydzyk has himself expressed hostility toward Jews, describing them as greedy during a 2007 talk in which he criticized then-President Lech Kaczynski for bowing to pressure to compensate people - many of them Jews - for property nationalized by the postwar communist government, and for donating land for a Jewish museum in Warsaw.

“For many years we have heard Rydzyk and Radio Maryja ‘are no longer antisemitic’ and then it turns out nothing has changed,” Rafał Pankowski, a Polish academic and founder of the Never Again Association, an antisemitism watchdog, told Haaretz.

Pankowski — who was not invited to the June 30 reception — explained that, on top of antisemitism, Radio Maryja had spread “Covid-19 conspiracy theories as well as hostility against Ukrainian refugees” in recent years.

While stating that “it is for the ambassador to decide who is invited in line with the embassy's priorities,” Pankowski added that here is “no meaningful justification for hosting Rydzyk at the embassy.”

“He is the godfather of contemporary far-right nationalism and antisemitism in Poland. It is symbolic and damaging to Israel's reputation,” he asserted.

It remains unclear whether Israeli Ambassador Yacov Livne, who spoke at a college established by Rydzyk earlier this year, actually invited him to attend the reception or if he merely showed up uninvited.

Asked for comment, the Foreign Ministry told Haaretz that Pankowski had indeed been invited but failed to address Rydzyk's presence directly.

In a statement, the ministry said: “The Embassy of Israel in Poland held an impressive and well-attended event in Warsaw on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Israel's independence. Senior officials of the Polish government, representatives from all sides of the political map and contacts who accompany the work of the embassy and Israel-Poland relations for many years were invited and attended the event. We are happy that the relations between the countries are back on track after a difficult period, and the impressive attendance at the event also testified to this.”

The Polish embassy in Tel Aviv told Haaretz that it was “not involved in any way in this event” and had not been consulted regarding the reception's guest list.

“Neither the Jewish community of Poland nor any of the rabbis of Poland have any contact with Rydzyk,” Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich, who also attended the event, told Haaretz.

However, Jonathan Ornstein, the executive director of a Jewish community center in the southern city of Krakow, said that recent statements about Jews on Radio Maryja do not preclude his participation in an embassy event.

“I personally dislike his politics and what he and the entities he controls have said about Jews but it is important to engage and try to bridge distance with contact and education,” he said.

“I believe in dialogue even more so when there is a difficult past. If he wants to celebrate the anniversary of Israel's independence, I'd say that's generally a good thing.”

Polish-Israeli relations have been repeatedly rocked by arguments over commemoration of the Holocaust — with critics accusing Warsaw of seeking to downplay Polish participation in the murder of the country's Jewish community and silence historians who differ from the official government narrative.

JTA and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-07-05/ty-article/.premium/antisemitic-priest-attends-israeli-independence-day-event-in-poland/00000189-2699-d145-a1e9-37ff44ac0000>