

‘Sieg Heiling Idiot’ Forced to Resign From Senior State Historian’s Post in Poland Following Global Outcry

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The far right activist appointed earlier this month to a senior position in the Polish state-run Institute for National Remembrance (IPN) resigned on Monday following a domestic and international outcry over his assignment.

Tomasz Greniuch — one of the founders of the ultranationalist National Radical Camp (ONR) group in Poland — had been named as head of the IPN’s branch in the city of Wrocław.



Over the last week, photographs of Greniuch attending far-right demonstrations — with more than one showing him giving the outstretched “sieg heil” salute adopted by the Nazis — have been shared widely on social media.

The IPN’s president, Jaroslaw Szarek, issued a statement saying that due to “the circumstances regarding the appointment of Tomasz Greniuch for the post of acting Director of the IPN’s Wrocław Branch, he cannot continue to perform this function.”

The initial news of Greniuch’s appointment to the IPN — a taxpayer-funded institution that commemorates Poland’s experiences under German occupation followed by Communist Party rule — had resulted in a storm of protest from several Polish politicians as well as Jewish leaders.

On Sunday, Polish President Andrzej Duda expressed his opposition to Greniuch’s appointment without naming him specifically. According to Wojciech Kolarski, the minister in the president’s office responsible for Polish-Jewish relations, Duda emphasized his “unequivocal position” that the “director of the IPN can only be a person of unblemished opinion.”

Duda’s statement on the IPN controversy came after Abraham Foxman — the national director emeritus of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and a survivor of the Holocaust in Poland — contacted him directly. In a message to the Polish leader,

Foxman told him, “I believe that you will be able to end the Wrocław scandal and the growing conflict related to it, which does not serve Poland well.”

Duda’s comments followed criticism from other politicians linked to the ruling nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) Party. Maciej Wąsik, the Polish interior ministry’s secretary of state, declared that there was “no place for heiling [Nazi-saluting] idiots in our public space. I count on a quick reaction of the IPN management.”

Several Polish media outlets pointed out, however, that Duda had helped to legitimize Greniuch as a bona-fide historian by awarding him the Bronze Cross of Merit in 2018.

Prominent academics and influencers in Poland also called for Greniuch to be ousted. An open letter to the IPN signed by more than 100 people argued that a single statement from Greniuch distancing himself from his recent past was not enough.

“Changing views and ideological attitudes is of course possible and permissible, and withdrawing from nationalist or even fascist views is most welcome,” the letter stated. “However, a man entrusted with managerial functions in a public institution responsible for conducting historical research and educating the public about World War II must prove that he completely dissociates himself from previously held extreme views, and convince the public of this not with a single statement, but with many years of activity.”

Among the signatories to the letter was Dr. Barbara Engelking, a highly-regarded historian of the Holocaust, who was found guilty by a court in Warsaw on Feb. 9 of ‘libeling’ Edward Malinowski, a wartime Polish mayor who was alleged to have betrayed 20 Jews hiding from the Germans. Together with her colleague Prof. Jan Grabowski, Engelking was ordered to issue a public apology for “violating the honor” of Malinowski.

In an interview on Monday with the Polish broadcaster TVN 24, Rafal Pankowski — the director of the ‘NEVER AGAIN Association,’ a Polish anti-racist NGO — asserted that the fundamental problem of the IPN’s leadership still remained.

“The problem is the leadership of the Institute of National Remembrance, which has enabled Greniuch to make such a brilliant career over the years,” Pankowski argued. Asked whether IPN president Szarek should resign, Pankowski answered, “That would be the honorable solution to this situation.”

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