

Study: ‘Surge’ in Polish antisemitism since controversial Holocaust law

By Jeremy Sharon
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A new academic study by the Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs has described “a surge” in hostility to Jews and Israel in Polish media and politics in 2018 following the efforts to pass a controversial law making it a crime to say that the Polish state or nation was complicit in the Holocaust.

According to the study written by Dr. Rafał Pankowski, a sociology professor at Warsaw’s Collegium Civitas, there has been a “disturbing revival of antisemitism” in Poland since the law was introduced and stirred controversy.

“The surge of hostility to Jews and the Jewish State in the Polish media and politics in early 2018 took many observers by surprise,” wrote Pankowski for the IJFA, a publication of the Israel Council on Foreign Relations which operates under the auspices of the World Jewish Congress.

“It was also a great shock because, for many years, bilateral relations between Poland and Israel had been especially cordial and fruitful.”

Pankowski noted that Poland has made “significant progress in recognizing and researching the inconvenient truths about its own legacy of antisemitism” unlike other post-Communist countries in eastern Europe.

“In the wake of the new legislation, however, that progress has been seriously hampered and the findings of these historians, and even their patriotism, has been called into question,” he wrote.

He noted that while in recent years anti-Jewish discourse was mainly confined to extreme quarters, of late it has found a prominent place in the mainstream media, especially in state-controlled news outlets.

“The surge in radical nationalist discourse,” warns Dr. Pankowski, “reflects a deeper crisis of liberal, democratic, and humanistic values – in Poland and elsewhere in post-Communist Europe, as well as in the wider world.”

Last month, Poland amended the law and removed sections making it a crime to say the country was complicit in the Holocaust.

The crisis boiled over again earlier this month however, when Yad Vashem issued a strong denunciation of a joint statement by the Israeli and Polish governments issued immediately after the law was amended, in which the Holocaust museum said that the “historical assertions, presented as unchallenged facts, in the joint statement contain grave errors and deceptions.”

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