

A Far-Right Writer Was Refused Entry to the UK and Poland Is Freaking Out

By Tim Hume
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Rafal Ziemkiewicz, who has been accused of anti-Semitic, Islamophobic and homophobic views, was denied entry to the UK. That's sparked a wave of online abuse against a British MP who has previously called him out.

Poland has said it will summon the British ambassador to explain why controversial far-right agitator Rafal Ziemkiewicz was denied entrance to the UK, sparking a furious response from his nationalist supporters.

That's included a wave of abusive online messages, some of them explicitly Islamophobic, targeting British MP Rupa Huq, who had previously spoken out against a proposed UK speaking tour by Ziemkiewicz in 2018. Huq shared some of the abusive messages on Twitter on Monday, one of which showed a crude racist caricature of a naked man praying, with Huq's name written on his backside.

The man at the centre of the row is Rafal Ziemkiewicz, a far-right journalist and writer who campaigners have accused of pushing anti-Semitic, Islamophobic and homophobic views. Last year, Poland's Human Rights Ombudsman accused Ziemkiewicz of anti-Semitism after he stated on public television that Jews had cooperated with Germans during the Holocaust.

On Saturday, Ziemkiewicz was detained at Heathrow airport while travelling with his wife and daughter, who is studying at Oxford University. He was subsequently denied entry and flew back to Warsaw.

According to a Home Office letter, posted on Twitter by Huq, Ziemkiewicz was refused permission to enter "due to [his] conduct and views which are at odds with British values and likely to cause offence."

Ziemkiewicz – who writes for a Polish news magazine, *Do Rzeczy*, which often pushes the agenda of the conservative ruling Law and Justice party and has a large following on Youtube – has railed against his treatment by British authorities in the Polish media and online. That's made his ban a major news story there, with politicians on the right seizing on the issue, blaming liberal and left-wing Poles for demonising Ziemkiewicz and undermining free speech.

Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister Szymon Szynkowski vel Sek tweeted on Monday that he would "invite British Ambassador Anna Clunes to the Foreign Ministry to make sure that freedom of speech is included in the catalogue of British values and to ask how this corresponds to the attitude of British services to Rafal Ziemkiewicz."

Meanwhile, leading Polish MEP Zdzislaw Krasnodębski called on Twitter for British nationals "who spread hateful fake news about Poland" to be expelled in retribution, while Jacek Wilk, an MP for the far-right Konfederacja party, called the British decision "an attack on one of the pillars of Western, European and Latin civilization, which has always been based on freedom of thought, speech and conscience."

In an interview with *wprost.pl* on Monday, Ziemkiewicz recounted his experience at the border, and complained of being held "in the company of men with the beauty of Uber drivers, most of whom did not speak English" – an apparent racist dig at South Asians.

He told the outlet that Huq may have been behind the ban, labelling her "a Muslim anti-Semite," a criticism that was echoed by many of his supporters in their abuse of Huq online. In a video on his Youtube channel, he described Huq as a "Muslim idiot."

But Huq, the MP for Ealing Central and Acton, told VICE World News that she had had no role in the Border Force's decision to deny entry to Ziemkiewicz, although she welcomed the decision.

“In the UK we do not believe in or provide a platform to people who hold anti-Semitic, racist or homophobic beliefs,” she said.

“As an MP who represents a constituency with the second largest population of Polish people outside of Poland, I have a duty to stand up for what is right. I have also been commended for raising the issue by many Polish people in my constituency.

“Although I did not have any involvement or influence over the decision made by the Border Force yesterday, I support the decision to not allow anybody into the UK who is not conducive to British values.”

Huq had previously called for Ziemkiewicz to be denied entry to the UK when she was tipped off that he was planning a speaking tour targeting Britain’s Polish community in 2018. Given the concerns about Ziemkiewicz’s rhetoric in Poland, where anti-racist groups such as the Never Again Association say he has contributed to the increased mainstreaming of anti-Semitism in public discourse, she and other MPs spoke out against the events, resulting in them being shut down.

Ziemkiewicz then said he would not be coming to the UK, describing Britain as a “fascist” country.

Rafal Pankowski, head of Poland’s Never Again Association, told VICE World News that for years, Ziemkiewicz “publicly insulted and humiliated minorities such as Jews, Muslims, and gay people as well as his critics, contributing to a growing climate of hate and fear.”

“It comes as no surprise that at a certain point his harmful activity should result in some consequences for himself,” he said.

“It is also highly ironic Ziemkiewicz was a big enthusiast of Brexit and strict border control.”

He said that Ziemkiewicz was a one of the most prominent voices contributing to a climate of growing anti-Semitism in Poland in recent years. This had been noticeable since Poland’s ultra-conservative government made a controversial amendment to the National Remembrance Law in 2018, making it an offence to attribute any responsibility for Nazi atrocities, including the Holocaust, to Poles.

The law, which asserted extra-territoriality – meaning it applied, in the Polish government’s eyes, anywhere in the law – drew a vociferous international response, with critics in the US, Israel, and elsewhere in Europe labelling it an attempt to whitewash history by turning a blind eye to the elements of Polish society that participated in the persecution of Jews. That in turn triggered an outpouring of nationalist sentiment in Poland, much of it with a pronounced anti-Jewish slant, said Pankowski.

“I’m not saying anti-Semitism was invented in 2018, but it became a lot more socially acceptable to express it in a crude way,” he told VICE World News.

Ziemkiewicz is not the first far-right firebrand from Poland who has tried to build support from Britain’s Polish community, estimated to number more than 800,000 people. In 2017, Jacek Międlar, a former priest famous for a nationalist speech he delivered proclaiming “Always the gospel! Never the Koran!”, was denied entrance to the country at Stansted airport, hours before he was due to address a Britain First rally.

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