

Cries of ‘Death to the Jews!’ Ring Out at Angry Demonstration in Poland as Far-Right Agitators Burn ‘Symbol of Tolerance’

Ben Cohen
November 12, 2021

the **algemeiner**

Shouting slogans that included “Death to the Jews” and “LGBT, pedophiles, Zionists — enemies of Poland”, hundreds of ultra-nationalists took over the center of a provincial Polish town on Thursday to mark their country’s independence day with a brazenly antisemitic demonstration.

The scenes at Thursday’s demonstration in Kalisz, a city of 100,000 in central Poland, shocked even veteran observers of the Polish far-right. “They were chanting ‘Death, Death, Death’ and ‘Death to the Jews,’” Rafal Pankowski — executive director of the “Never Again” Association, a Polish anti-racist NGO — told *The Algemeiner* on Friday.

“In more than 25 years of monitoring antisemitism in Poland, I have never seen anything like this,” Pankowski added.

The centerpiece of the demonstration was the ceremonial burning of the medieval statute for which Kalisz is famed that granted legal protections to the Jews in the historic Duchy of Greater Poland.

Issued by Prince Boleslaw the Pious in 1264, the Statute of Kalisz defined rules under which Jews were allowed to engage in lending and trade, as well as norms related to their relations with Christians. Long regarded as a symbol of the protected status of Poland’s Jewish community, the statute also included penalties for the desecration of a Jewish cemetery or synagogue as well as for the promotion of the notorious “blood libel” — just over a century after its first appearance in England — directed against Jews.

As the crowd at Thursday’s protest in Kalisz chanted nationalist slogans, demonstrators poured lighter fuel over a folio containing a copy of the statute before setting it alight.

One speaker at the rally, far-right activist Piotr Rybak, attacked what he called a “Polish-speaking rabble” who were plotting against “Poles in their own homeland.” His voice reaching fever pitch, Rybak pledged to “chase this Polish-speaking mob to Israel, just like we did in 1968” — a reference to the antisemitic campaign of that year launched by the former Communist Party regime under the guise of rooting out “Zionists.”

Another speaker, Wojciech Olszanski, bellowed that “LGBTers, pedophiles, Zionists are the enemies of Poland!” Throughout the event, the crowd chanted slogans including “Death to the Jews,” “Death to the Enemies of the Motherland,” and “Once with a sickle, sometimes a hammer, the Red Rabble” — a reference to the widely-believed myth among

Polish nationalists that Jews were responsible for the installation of Communist Party rule following World War II.

Several politicians and local figures expressed disgust at the demonstration and anger at the local authorities in Kalisz for allowing it to proceed.

“Coming to Kalisz to burn the Statute of Kalisz — a testimony to the centuries-old tradition of tolerance and openness — amid hateful shouts in the Main Market Square is like spitting in the face of all Kalisz residents,” Karolina Pawliczak, who represents Kalisz in the Polish parliament, wrote on Twitter. “Where were the city authorities?”

Maciej Blachowicz, a historian based in Kalisz, said that the burning of the statute had brought on feelings of “shame, disgrace and sadness.”

“The burning of the statute can absolutely be compared with the burning of books during Kristallnacht in Berlin,” Blachowicz continued, in a reference to the Nov. 9-10, 1938 Nazi-directed pogrom against the Jewish community across Germany. Local residents also expressed horror at the demonstration.

“In my opinion, after the slogans ‘Death to the enemies of the motherland’ and ‘Death to the Jews’, such an assembly should be broken up!” commented one Kalisz resident, Marcin Wozniak, on a local website.

In a joint statement on Friday, the city’s mayor and its police department defended the decision to allow Thursday’s protest to continue despite multiple reports of incitement to violence.

“The representative of the Mayor of the City of Kalisz, together with the representatives of the City Police Headquarters in Kalisz and the Provincial Police Headquarters in Poznan, decided not to dissolve the assembly for reasons of safety and public order,” the statement explained. “The dissolution of the assembly could have caused an escalation of aggression among the participants.”

Police have been studying video of the demonstration and have reportedly identified 67 individuals and several banners displaying messages that are prohibited under Polish and EU legislation on hate speech.

<https://www.algemeiner.com/2021/11/12/cries-of-death-to-the-jews-ring-out-at-angry-demonstration-in-poland-as-far-right-agitators-burn-symbol-of-tolerance>