

# Poland: Sentiments Count but Facts Prevail

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We highly respect Truthdig and its commitment to drilling beneath the headlines. However, I was amazed at the tone and insinuations not based on facts about the Polish – Jewish relations in the article “The New European Fascists” written by Chris Hedges and posted on July 24, 2016.

I am from Poland. I was born on May 13, 1945, five days after the capitulation of Germany which ended World War II in Europe. I grew up listening to stories about members of my family, friends and their children who were tortured and died victims of the war crimes and crimes against humanity. Some fragments of Chris Hedges’ article are an insult to their memory.

Below are quotations from this article followed by my comments.

**Chris Hedges (CH): “... Jan Gross, a Polish-born American who courageously confronted the taboo topic of Polish complicity in the Nazi extermination of nearly all of Poland’s 3 million Jews.”**

**Facts:** Poland under the Nazi occupation was the only country where the Germans issued a decree that any help rendered to the Jews to save their lives will be punished by death, not only the person that helps but also his whole family. And yet, at great risk to themselves and their families, out of 3 million Poles who perished in the war 50, 000 were executed by the Germans for rescuing Jews from the Nazis (Richard C. Lukas, Wikipedia). We didn’t read too much about them, because this information was suppressed by the Soviet-installed communist regime in Poland. And Poles by their nature are modest and don’t like to brag, or what might look like bragging.

If we look at international documents listing nationalities which helped to save Jews during the Holocaust, Polish rescuers represent the biggest number (Richard C. Lukas, Yad Vashem).

Poland was unique among the German-occupied countries to have an organization “Zegota” to help the Jewish people. Scholars estimate that you needed the cooperation of ten Poles to save one Jew (Lukas).

The State of Israel established a special commission to honor non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews from the extermination by the Nazis. They are

called The Righteous Among the Nations. As of January 1, 2016, this award was given to 26,120 people. And do you know which country is in the first place? Poland with 6,620 Polish names written on the Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

**CH: “Jan Gross reminding Poles that they killed more Jews than they killed Germans during the war.”**

**Facts:** The Polish soldiers were fighting the Germans in Poland defending their homeland. They were fighting in France, in the United Kingdom on the Western and Italian fronts, on the Eastern fronts and in the underground armies. Numerous international sources state that the Polish Army was the fourth biggest Allied Fighting Contingent after the American, British and Soviet Armies. Polish military casualties during World War II are estimated at 1,050,298 soldiers.

To be sure, there were anti-Semites in Poland, as in many other countries for that matter. But they represented the exception rather than the rule; a footnote, not the core. A whole nation cannot be condemned for the actions of a few. It is historically and morally wrong.

**CH: “... the myth in Poland that Poles were solely heroic victims of the war.”**

**Facts:** Dr. Richard C. Lukas, an American historian who is a leading authority on Poland during World War II wrote a book “The Forgotten Holocaust.” He asks a question, “Why do we allow Non-Jewish Holocaust victims to be forgotten?” He is reminding the world that the Poles perished also, so did Polish citizens from other ethnic minorities, such as Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians who are not even mentioned in official statistics.

Norman Davies is reminding the world that Poland suffered percentage wise the greatest human and material losses. Approximately six million people died: about one fifth of the prewar population. The war destroyed 38% of Poland’s national assets. A major part of Polish industry and agriculture infrastructure had been lost. Warsaw and other cities were leveled to the ground. Museums were looted and art objects stolen.

**CH quoting Elzbieta Janicka: “Jewish citizens were treated by Catholic Poles as foreign elements, if not outright enemies.”**

**Facts:** Has it ever occurred to you to ask the question why so many Jews lived in pre-war Poland, more than in any other country?

The American Jewish Committee gave the figures of Jewish people in the United States and Abroad in 1938. According to that table Poland had the largest number of Jews – 3,113,900. Why? Because for over 800 years the Jews found shelter in Poland escaping pogroms in Spain, France, Germany and Russia.

From 1025 when the Kingdom of Poland was founded throughout centuries, Poland was the most tolerant country in Europe (Hugh Redwald Trevor Roper). It was known as “Paradise for the Jews.”

To get to know and understand over one thousand years of Polish history it is not enough to take a stroll through the streets of Warsaw or chat over a cup of coffee.

You cannot present the history of Polish Jews as a footnote because this only foments distrust, misunderstanding, animosity, hatred and not peace on earth. Regardless of the present political situation in Poland today, such an attitude is unwarranted and hurtful.

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